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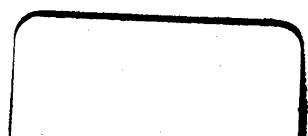


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OF THE MOON

V. SPEIGHT \* \* \* \*





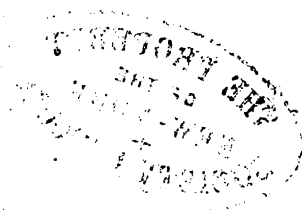
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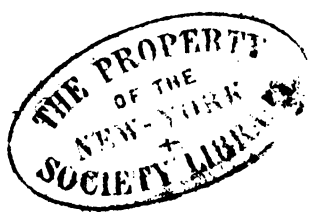
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“ Good people, your money or your lives ! ” he said.

— Page 4

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# PLAN OF THE MOON

BY

E. W. SPENCER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY THE AUTHOR. "UNFINISHED," "BY THE AUTHOR. "UNFINISHED," "BY THE AUTHOR. "UNFINISHED," "BY THE AUTHOR. "UNFINISHED," ETC.



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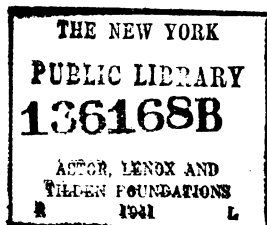
BY  
T. W. SPEIGHT

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE," "HOODWINKED," "BY  
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# A MINION OF THE MOON.

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## THE PROLOGUE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### "WE FLY BY NIGHT."

WHEN the nineteenth century was still a puling infant scarcely able to stand alone, and not yet knowing what to make of the strange hurly-burly into which it found itself born, Abel Ringwood and Sarah his wife were respectively landlord and landlady of the King's Arms, a noted commercial hotel and posting-house at Appleford, a town in the North of England, on one of the great coach roads from the south to Scotland. All His Majesty's mails, which travelled by that route, stopped to change horses at the King's Arms, and, as there was a great deal of private posting by noblemen and rich commoners in those days, the hotel stables had seldom fewer than from twenty to thirty horses in them at one time.

In view of the fact that Appleford was—and is—on the high-road from the south to Gretna Green, it was hardly to be wondered at that a week seldom passed without one or more runaway couples stopping to change horses at the King's Arms, and then hurrying on again, helter-skelter, as hard as they could go. Thus there was nothing out of the common when, about six o'clock on a certain December evening, a post-chaise dashed up to the hotel door containing a runaway couple and a lady's maid.

The gentleman, although he seemed in a desperate hurry to get on, induced the young lady to alight in order to re-

lieve her cramped limbs while fresh horses were being put into the chaise, and the lamps freshly trimmed. She declined all refreshment, but he partook of a glass of sherry and a biscuit, while a glass of steaming negus was handed to the maid inside. The young lady, who was dressed from head to foot in expensive furs, was exceedingly pretty, with large, pathetic-looking eyes, and a wistful smile. The gentleman was enveloped in a long military cloak, and was evidently connected with the army. In three minutes and a half they were on the road again. Everybody there, down to the stable-boy, wished them God-speed and a happy ending to their adventure. The evening was clear and frosty; there had been a slight fall of snow in the afternoon, which still lay crisp and white on the hard roads; the moon would rise in less than an hour.

No long time passed before it was known throughout the hotel who the runaways were. The post-boy whispered the news to John Ostler, who, a few minutes later, told it to his mistress. The lady was Miss Dulcie Peyton, the niece and ward of Sir Peter Warrendale, of Scrope Hall, near Whatton Regis. The gentleman was a Captain Pascoe, the heir of an old but impoverished family.

According to report, Sir Peter had set his heart on his niece's marrying some one who was utterly distasteful to her, and, with more anger than politeness, had shown Captain Pascoe the door when that gentleman had called upon him to ask permission to pay his addresses to Miss Dulcie. It was further reported that for the last three months or more the poor young lady had been virtually a prisoner, never on any pretence being allowed outside the precincts of the park; and that Sir Peter vowed a prisoner she should remain till the last hour of his guardianship had struck, which would not be for three long years to come. But "bolts and bars cannot keep love out," nor in either, for that matter. The pretty bird had escaped from its cage, and everybody devoutly hoped that it would not be recaptured.

The runagates had not been gone more than forty min-



utes when up dashed another post-chaise, out of which bounced a very irascible-looking, red-faced, middle-aged gentleman, presumably Sir Peter Warrendale, who, with much spluttering and several expletives, ordered fresh horses to be instantly put into the chaise, and then, perceiving comely Mrs. Ringwood where she sat among the glasses and bottles in her little snugery, he strode up to her, and in his arrogant way demanded to know whether she had seen anything of a runaway couple, who, so he was credibly informed, had passed through Appleford a little while before on their way to Gretna Green.

Now, the conscience of the worthy landlady was of that tender kind that it would not allow her to tell a lie, but, in order to give the fugitives a few minutes more start, she asked him to describe the two persons to whom he referred. This he did in very few words, and nothing was then left Mrs. Ringwood but to confess that she had seen the young people in question, and that they had changed horses there about an hour before.

On hearing this, the red-faced gentleman indulged in more bad language, ordered a glass of hot brandy-and-water, which half choked him in his hurry to swallow it, and then, still growling savagely in his throat, was shut up next minute in his chaise, and driven rapidly away. One small service Mrs. Ringwood had been able to do the runaways. She had secretly told John Ostler to let them have the two best horses in the stables, and the latter, of his own accord, had supplied the red-faced gentleman with the two worst. Unless something unforeseen should happen, there was not much likelihood of the fugitives being overtaken.

Everything was going well with them, they had left Appleford about a dozen miles behind, and had pretty well got over the worst part of the fells, when one of the horses fell lame, and it quickly became apparent that the poor animal was unable to go at any pace faster than a walk, and that only with difficulty. What was to be done?

The next place where they could hope to obtain fresh



horses was five or six miles ahead, and it was almost a certainty that before they could get so far they would be overtaken by Sir Peter, who, they had not the slightest doubt, was in close pursuit of them. The quick-witted post-boy suggested that they should tie the lame horse to a tree by the roadside, leaving it to be fetched later on, and press forward as fast as possible with the remaining horse; but, even so, the chances were that the irate Sir Peter would overtake them before another hour had gone by. It was a desperate chance, but no other was left them.

The post-boy had just tied up the lame horse, and was on the point of mounting the other, when, not more than a dozen yards from the chaise, and as if he had sprung that moment out of the ground, a masked horseman leaped the rough wall that divided the high-road from the fells. "Stand, or you are a dead man!" he exclaimed in commanding tones, as he presented a pistol at the post-boy's head. Then, turning to the chaise window, which was open, and at the same moment flashing a bull's-eye lantern on the travellers: "Good people your money or your lives!" he said. The maid gave utterance to a scream; but the young lady only clung in terrified silence to her lover's arm.

A network of filmy clouds covered the sky; but the moon, which had now risen, gave enough light to enable the postilion to see that the highwayman was mounted on a powerful black horse with a white stocking on its near fore-leg, and a white star on its forehead; that he wore a bell-shaped beaver hat; that his mask just reached to the tip of his nose, and that his outer garment was a dark horseman's cloak with several capes to it.

"I durst wager a thousand pounds to a farden it's Captain Nightshade," he muttered under his breath.

"Sir," said the young captain, bending forward so that his face was in a line with the open window, speaking with much dignity and a ceremonious politeness more common in those days than now, "here is my watch, together with that of this lady, and here are our purses;

but if the feelings of a gentleman are still cherished by you—and by your accent I judge you to be one—and if the sentiments of our common humanity have still power to appeal to your heart, I beg and entreat that you do not leave us wholly destitute of the means wherewith to prosecute our journey. I and this lady are on our way to Gretna Green. She has escaped from the custody of a most tyrannical uncle, who is also her guardian, and who would fain force her into marriage with a man whom she detests. That he is in pursuit of us, and no great distance behind, we have every reason to believe. Now, sir, should you be sufficiently hard-hearted to deprive us of the whole of our funds, even should we by some miracle be enabled to reach the end of our journey, the needful gold would still be lacking wherewith to forge that link of Hymen which would give me a husband's right to protect this dear girl from all the tyrannical uncles in existence."

The highwayman had listened attentively. The reins lay on his horse's neck; his left hand held the lantern, the light from which shone full into the body of the chaise; his right grasped a pistol the barrel of which gleamed coldly in the moonlight.

"Sir, not another word, I entreat," he said when the captain had done speaking, bowing low and withdrawing the light of his lantern at the same moment. "Never shall it be said of me that I took toll of lovers in distress. Rather would I do all that in me lies to aid them as far as my poor powers might avail."

"Sir, I thank you most heartily," answered the captain with as much high-breeding as though he were addressing a duke.

"One of your horses has fallen lame, is it not so?" demanded the robber.

"Alas! yes; and the chances are a score to one that we shall be overtaken by Sir Peter before we can reach any place where we can obtain fresh ones."

The highwayman, who had put back his pistol into its holster, refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff from a

box, the jewels in which flashed in the moonbeams, before he spoke. Then he said:—

“In that case, sir, it seems to me there is only one thing left you to do.”

“And that is——?” queried the captain eagerly.

“For you and the young lady to make use of my mare to speed you on your journey. Leila will carry the pair of you to Gretna, and be as fresh as a daisy at the end of it. And as for Sir Peter overtaking you——” His scornful laugh rang clear through the frosty night.

Captain Pascoe might be excused if he fairly gasped for breath as he listened to this extraordinary proposition, but it was far too good an offer to be lightly refused. As a matter of politeness he made some slight demur, which the highwayman promptly overruled, and three minutes later he was astride the black mare. Then the highwayman, taking the young lady round the waist, swung her lightly on to the crupper.

“But what is to become of you?” queried the captain.

“Never fear for me, sir,” replied the other. “I shall know how to take care of myself.”

Then in a low voice he gave the captain certain instructions where to leave the mare, which he would send a trusty man to reclaim on the morrow.

Then the captain held out his hand, which the other frankly grasped. “It is the hand of one,” he said, “who, under different circumstances, would doubtless have been a different man.”

Then the two men lifted their hats, the lady waved her hand, and half a minute later black Leila and her double burden had disappeared round a turn of the road.

## CHAPTER II.

## ON THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

THE amazed post-boy was now directed to put the lame horse back into its place and go slowly ahead, while the highwayman himself took the captain's place inside the chaise.

"Don't you be frightened, my dear," he said to the trembling waiting-woman, whom her young mistress had done her best to reassure before leaving her. "I love your sex far too dearly ever to harm one of you. With your leave I will ride part of the way with you, and should anybody ask my name, you may call me Mr. Darke."

He removed his mask as he spoke; but it was too dark inside the chaise to allow of his features being distinguished, even if the waiting-woman had not been too terrified to do more than glance furtively at him.

They had gone on slowly for about a quarter of an hour when it became evident that some other vehicle was approaching them rapidly from the rear.

"Keep your veil down and don't say a word," said Mr. Darke to his companion after a backward glance through the open window.

He drew his hat down over his brows and turned up the collar of his redingote about his ears, so that even had it been daylight little of his face would have been visible. It was not unlikely that the Sir Peter of whom mention had been made might do the same as he had done—throw the light of a lantern on the inmates of the chaise.

Presently the pursuing chaise came up at a great pace, the post-boy lashing his horses freely, and, passing the other one, drew up suddenly some dozen yards ahead, straight across the narrow road, so as effectually to bar its progress and bring it to a stand.

Mr. Darke put his head out of the window. "Post-boy, what is the meaning of this stoppage?" he called. "Why don't you go on?"

"Can't do it, sir—road blocked by t'other shay."

Before more could be said, Sir Peter himself came stalking up trembling with rage, followed by his servant with a lantern.

"So, so! sir, your nefarious scheme has not succeeded; your villainous plot has miscarried, as it deserved to do," he stuttered, his words tumbling headlong over each other in his passion. "I'll have the law of you, sir, for this! You shall be taught that you cannot run off with a gentleman's ward with impunity! You shall be cast for damages, sir. Five thousand pounds—not one farthing less—damme!—But where is that niece of mine—the shameless hussy? I will——"

"May I ask, sir, the meaning of this singular outrage?" demanded a grave, stern voice from the interior of the chaise. "If His Majesty's liege subjects are to be stopped on the highway by every inebriate brawler, it is indeed time for the hand of authority to intervene. I am myself in the Commission of Peace, and I must demand from you your name and address, sir, in order that further inquiry may be made into this most discreditable proceeding."

But by this time the servant had directed the rays of his lantern into the interior of the chaise. Sir Peter stood like a man petrified. In the farther corner sat a plainly-dressed, thin, angular woman, bolt upright, and as rigid as a ramrod, who, although her face was hidden by a thick veil, no one in his senses would for a moment mistake for Miss Dulcie Peyton, and it was doubtless owing to the veil that he failed to recognize in her that young lady's maid, with whose features he was presum-

ably not unfamiliar. Of the person who had addressed him little could be seen save a large aquiline nose and a pair of fierce black eyes. It was equally impossible, however, to confound him with Captain Pascoe.

"I crave your pardon, sir," said Sir Peter, in a tone of almost abject apology, as he took off his hat and made a ceremonious bow. "I shall never forgive myself for my stupid blunder; but the fact is I mistook your chaise for the one in which a niece of mine—confound her!—is at the present moment on her way to Gretna Green. We had tidings of her at the place where we last changed horses, and I made sure that the first chaise we should overtake must be the one of which we were in pursuit."

"Sir, your apology makes ample amends," responded Mr. Darke in the most gracious of tones. "Your mistake was a most natural one. No doubt the flight of your niece has been a source of much annoyance to you."

The scowl on Sir Peter's face was not pleasant to see.

"If once I clap hands on her, she won't escape me again. Bolts and bars and bread-and-water—that's the only treatment for refractory wenches. But pardon me for not introducing myself. I am Sir Peter Warrendale, of Scrope Hall, near Whatton Regis."

"And I, Colonel Delnay, of Scowthwaite, by Carlisle." At this point the two gentlemen bowed ceremoniously to each other. "I trust, Sir Peter, to have the pleasure of meeting you on some more auspicious occasion."

"With all my heart, Colonel, I reciprocate the wish. But, ouns-an-codlins! I'm forgetting all about my runaway niece. May I ask whether anything has passed you on the road at all resembling a fly-by-night couple in a post-chaise?"

"Nothing resembling what you speak of, Sir Peter, I give you my word. Most likely they have a post-boy with them who is acquainted with the short cut across the fells. It's a dangerous road for a chaise to traverse

after dark, and the chances are that they will come to grief before they reach the end of it."

"I'd give a hundred guineas, damme if I wouldn't, if one of their lynch-pins was to drop out! But I may yet be in time to overtake 'em."

And so, with a few more polite phrases on both sides, the two men parted.

No sooner had the other chaise started on its way than Mr. Darke lay back in his seat and gave vent to a burst of hearty laughter. Then, in a full rich voice, he sang as under:—

You may ride through the night, nor draw rein all the day,  
Change horse as you list, and—tantivy! away!  
But from Humber to Ribble, 'twixt Derwent and Dee,  
You'll ne'er find a trace of sweet Ellen O'Lee!

"Poor uncle! Poor Sir Peter!" he exclaimed. "His pretty niece will have been wed a couple of hours ere he crosses the Border. What a surly old curmudgeon he looks! No wonder his little bird was tired of its cage, and seized the first chance to flutter its wings and away."

When they had gone about a mile further, he called to the post-boy to stop, and alighted from the chaise. Dipping his hand into one of his capacious pockets, he drew out something which he presented with a bow to the maid. "Here's a trifle for you, my dear, to keep you in mind of Mr. Darke," he said. "And now I must wish you good-night and *bon voyage*, with the hope that one of these days you will be run away with by as gallant a gentleman as he who has carried off your mistress."

With that he took off his hat and swept her a low bow with all the grace imaginable. Then, stepping up to the post-boy, he put a couple of guineas into his hand, "just to drink my health with," as he said.

Half-a-minute later he was lost to view in a plantation of young trees which at that point lined one side of the

road. The present he had given the maid proved to be a chased-silver sweetmeat box of elaborate workmanship, which had doubtless at one time been the property of some person of quality.

Some six weeks later than the events just recorded, Mrs. Ringwood, the landlady of the King's Arms, was drinking a dish of tea with her friend, Miss Capp, who had been from home for a couple of months, and was agog to hear all the news.

"The young people had been three hours married by the time Sir Peter reached Gretna Green," said the landlady, in continuation of what had gone before. "He stormed and raved, as a matter of course, and vowed he would have the law of Captain Pascoe; but it was well known that he would never have dared to go into court and let the world know with how much cruelty he had treated his orphan niece. When the captain and his bride came south a week later they stopped and dined at the King's Arms, and it was then I learned all the particulars I have just told you of their strange adventure."

"But what about Mr. Darke? What about the highwayman?" queried Miss Capp eagerly.

"I can tell you very little about him. As to who he really was, nothing has ever come out. He may have been the notorious Captain Nightshade, as the post-boy firmly believes, or he may not. The post-boy says he recognized him by the horse he was riding—a black mare, with a white stocking on the near fore-leg and a white blaze on the forehead. In any case, the act was that of one who had not forgotten that once on a time he was a gentleman."

"It was the act of one who, whatever his other faults may be, has not yet forfeited all right to that title," responded the enthusiastic spinster, who envied Miss Peyton's maid her adventure.

"By the way, I mustn't forget to tell you that poor Sir Peter was unlucky enough to be stopped on his way



back from Gretna Green, and eased of his watch and purse, together with his snuff-box, which latter it seems he set great store by, it being a sort of family heirloom. And I have it from the post-boy in charge of the chaise that as the highwayman was on the point of riding away he lifted his hat and said: 'Colonel Delnay has the honor, Sir Peter, to wish you a very good-night.'"

# THE NARRATIVE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A PRENTICE HAND.

AMONG other wayfarers who, on a certain evening some four months subsequently to the events already narrated, halted at the King's Arms Hotel, Appleford, in order to refresh the inner man, was a stranger on horse-back, with a rather bulky saddle-bag strapped behind him, who, judging from his style and appearance, might have been a cattle jobber on his way to some fair, or farm bailiff, a "statesman" who farmed his own acres, and had a comfortable little balance at the local bank; or, at any rate, a man used to a healthy, outdoor country life, to whom existence in a town would have been nothing less than intolerable.

Having dismounted from his very serviceable nag, he gave it into the ostler's charge, with strict injunctions that it was to be well cared for, and then made for the coffee-room, where, five minutes later, he was seated with a noble cold sirloin before him, and at his elbow a tankard of the best old ale the house could supply.

He was a prime trencherman, was John Dyce—they were common enough in those days—and it would have made a modern dyspeptic stare to watch the heroic way in which he attacked the sirloin, and with what unequivocal appetite one well-mustarded slice after another, with its accompaniment of delicious home-made bread, was disposed of. But not even John could go on eating forever, and by and by he laid down his knife and fork with an audible sigh, which might be partly due to the

satisfaction which comes—or should come—of comfortable repletion, and partly a sigh of regret at having to bid farewell to the sirloin. While the waiter cleared away he went as far as the stable in order to satisfy himself that his nag was being properly looked after. He was gone some little time, and when he came back he ordered a churchwarden pipe, a screw of tobacco, and a tumbler of cold punch to be brought him.

There were some half-dozen people in the room who had been there when he arrived, and a number of others had come and gone in the interim. Now and then a bell would be heard to ring somewhere indoors, now and then a chaise or other vehicle would rattle up to the door and come to an abrupt stand. The *Highflyer* coach, going south, had stopped for exactly three minutes and a half in order to change horses, during which time a majority of the passengers had crowded into the hotel, clamoring for drinks of various kinds.

John Dyce, sitting apart in a quiet corner of the long, oak-panelled, low-ceilinged room, and puffing meditatively at his churchwarden, had a quietly observant eye for every fresh face that came in. At length—but not till his glance had travelled more than once, with some anxiety in it, to the clock over the chimney-piece—his waiting was rewarded.

The coffee-room door opened, and there entered a little, comfortable-looking, rosy-gilled man, in whose features professional gravity seemed to be struggling against a latent sense of humor. He was Mr. Tew, managing clerk to Mr. Piljoy, solicitor of Arkrigg, a town at the other end of the county. His employer being laid up with gout, he had been sent to Stanbrook in his stead in order to get Squire Cortelyon's will duly signed and witnessed. Having accomplished his errand, he was now on his way back home, with the will carefully buttoned up inside his breast pocket. Squire Cortelyon was not expected to live from hour to hour.

"Bottle-green surtout with black velvet collar," muttered John Dyce to himself. "Front tooth broken short

off; red and black silk muffler round his throat; white beaver hat the worse for wear. It must be him."

Mr. Tew beckoned the waiter.

"Ham and eggs and a cup of strong coffee; and let me have them as quick as possible. I must be on the road again in half an hour."

"'Am-an'-eggs—yessir—have 'em in a jiffy. Going far, sir, to-night, may I ask?"

"Only as far as Arkrigg."

"A dozen long miles, sir, and as nasty a bit o' road as any in the county, being nearly all up-hill and windin' in an' out among the moors—let alone its bein' such a favorite road with Captain Nightshade." Then, insinuatingly: "Better stay where you are, sir. Could put you up very comfortable. His Grace of Malvern stayed with us a night last month, and before goin' away he says, says he——"

"No, no," broke in Mr. Tew good-naturedly—waiters in our great-grandfathers' days were often privileged mortals—"it's not a bit of use your trying to tempt me. Home to-night I must get—highly important; and as for Captain Nightshade, he flies at higher game than the likes of me. If he were to strip me to the shirt, all I have would hardly fetch him the price of a decent dinner and a bottle of wine. So now for my ham and eggs."

Not a word of all this had escaped John Dyce, but his stolid face was absolutely devoid of expression. He had changed his position to the settle near the chimney-corner, and was sitting with one hand buried deep in his breeches pocket, while the other held his long pipe, his gaze meanwhile being contemplatively fixed on a corner of the well-smoked ceiling.

He had already paid his "shot," and he now put down his pipe, stood up, yawned, stretched himself, and then, after clapping his hat on his head, strode slowly out of the room. Passing the bar, now empty of customers, through the inner window of which he could see the plump landlady busy with her knitting-needles, he paused for a few moments at the top of the flight of broad shallow steps which led up to the front door. Like so many similar

establishments in those days, the King's Arms Hotel formed three sides of a quadrangle, with the windows facing into it, the fourth side consisting of an open gateway large enough for a coach-and-four to be driven through with ease, having shops on either side, the windows of which fronted on the main street.

As John Dyce stood on the topmost step he looked to right and he looked to left. For a small provincial town the hour was growing late. In the inn yard no one was about. A light shone dimly through the stable window, and in one corner Mr. Tew's chaise, with two or three other vehicles, made a confused heap, dimly discernible. Half an hour later, with the arrival of the *Comet*, bound for Edinburgh, the whole place would wake up, as at the stroke of an enchanter's wand, to a brief spasm of feverish energy and excitement. Meanwhile somnolence reigned.

John Dyce, whistling under his breath, descended the steps and picked his way slowly in the direction of the stable, presumably in search of the ostler; but it was not till a full quarter of an hour later that he rode out of the inn yard, and, having crossed the market-place, took the road which led due north out of the town. The clock of the old church chimed the half-hour past ten as he left it behind. A crescent moon was sailing in a clear sky.

Presently John's nag broke into a gentle trot, and so the two jogged quietly along till the last house in Appleford had been left some four miles behind. Then, at a point where the road, dipping a little, cut through the dark heart of a plantation of firs, he drew rein and let his horse subside into a walk. He had got about half-way through the plantation when, a little way ahead of him, what looked like an irregular fragment of the blackness which walled him in on either hand broke itself away, as it were, and, moving out into the middle of the road, showed there clear and distinct by the light of the young moon, and then, as he drew a pace or two nearer, took on itself the shape of another horse and another rider.

John seemed in nowise alarmed by the sudden appari-

tion, but rather, indeed, as if the *rencontre* was not unexpected by him.

"So! it *is* you; I was rather doubtful at first," said the other in a full rich voice as he drew near. "Well, what luck have you had?"

As well as could be seen, the speaker was a young and very handsome man, with an unmistakable air of distinction. His outer garment was a long, loose, dark blue cloak without sleeves, fastened at the throat by a silver clasp, which hid the rest of his attire except his long riding boots and his small three-cornered hat. His dark hair, the real color of which could not be distinguished by that light, was slightly sprinkled with powder and tied up behind with black ribbon into the form of an ample queue. His hands were covered by a pair of buff gauntlets, and from the holsters in front of him the stocks of a brace of pistols bulged menacingly.

John Dyce carried a finger to his forehead as his nag came to halt. "Everything gone off all right, your honor," he said in reply to the young man's question. "I left Mr. Tew at the King's Arms in Appleford. He'd just ordered his supper, but seemed in a hurry to get on, and I should say that by this time he's nearly ready to start again, so that your honor's wait for him shouldn't be a long one. Before coming away I managed, unseen by anybody, to draw the charges of his pistols, which he had left behind him in the chaise when he went in to supper."

"Well done, John! There's far more in that head of years than most people give you credit for. But now you must leave me. I will await Mr. Tew here. I don't think I could find a more convenient bit of road for my purpose than this. You will wait for me, as arranged, at the first toll-bar on the Whinbarrow road."

"Better not send me away, your honor," said John in a tone of earnest entreaty; "better let me keep with you, or, at least, be within hail in case of accident."

"No, no, John, I won't have you mixed up in the affair more than is absolutely necessary. There's nothing to

fear—more especially now that you have drawn the charges of the pistols. But, at the best of times, I don't believe Mr. Tew has an ounce of courage in that plump, well-lined body of his. More likely than not he will take me for Captain Nightshade, and be all a-quake with fright. So you must just do as you are bidden, and make the best of your way to the place agreed upon. And remember, I forbid you on any account to wait about here."

John attempted no further protest, knowing, probably, how futile it would have been, but wheeling his nag round, without a word more started off down the road at a gentle trot.

The young man waited without stirring till the last thud of his horse's hoofs had died into silence. Then he shivered—the night was bitter enough to excuse his doing so—and drew his cloak more closely around him; and then he glanced about him, somewhat timorously it might have been thought.

"Pish! what folly is this!" he muttered peevishly. "A gentleman of the road, a despoiler of timid travellers, shivering and shaking because he finds himself alone, drawing on for midnight, on a solitary bit of the King's highway! I shall be frightened of my own shadow next. Captain Nightshade would indeed laugh me to scorn."

He patted his mare on the neck and began to walk her up and down on the narrow stretch of turf which fringed the road on either hand. It was not one of the great thoroughfares running north and south, busy day and night with traffic in one or other of its manifold forms, but merely a by-road between one provincial town and another. The only living things seen by our young horseman while he waited were a drove of cattle, in charge of a couple of men, on their way to Appleford market. While they were passing he withdrew into the shade of the plantation.

After all, he had hardly so long to wait as he had feared he would have. John Dyce had not been more than a quarter of an hour gone when his straining ears caught

the faint sound of wheels. He had already adjusted the crape mask he had brought with him, and settled his chin in the ample folds of the India silk muffler he had tied round his throat. He now set his hat more firmly on his head, and drew a pistol from its holster.

And now, some distance down the road, there shone two yellow points of flame, as they might be the eyes of some wild animal shining in the dark. They were the lamps of the coming chaise. Nearer and nearer sounded the hoof-beats of the horses on the hard road. A minute more and the whole concern had passed out of the moonlight into the gully of blackness in which our horseman was lurking. The moment for action had come. Three strides of his horse brought him into a line with the postilion. "Halt, or you are a dead man!" he called out in commanding tones, as he held a pistol to the man's head, and at once the horses were pulled up short on their haunches. It was not the first command of the kind that postilion had been called upon to obey.

The highwayman had brought no lantern with him. He knew, or thought he knew, quite well who the occupant of the chaise was. He could just discern a vague huddled-up figure in one corner. And now, in no uncertain voice, came the formula, sacred by long use on such occasions: "Your money or your life!" Not that it was the traveller's money our young friend was risking so much to obtain, but something very different, only he had not seen his way at the moment to vary the customary command.

The answer was a flash and a report from the interior of the chaise, and the same instant a harsh voice yelled out, "Drive on Tim, and be damned to you!" Hardly had the words left his lips before the post-boy's lash came down heavily on his horses, and the chaise sprang forward.

Unused to such surprises, the young man's horse shied violently and then backed towards the plantation, as if its rider had lost control of it. What would have happened next there is no telling, had not another horse and



rider, springing from nowhere, as it seemed, appeared at this instant on the scene. Our would-be highwayman, his hat fallen off and his head thrown back, was swaying in his saddle, and the newcomer was only just in time to grasp him round the waist, and so save him from falling.

A few seconds later he gave vent to a low whistle, expressive of an amazement almost too deep for words.

"By the Lord that made me—a woman!" was his whispered ejaculation.

## CHAPTER II.

## IN SEARCH OF A LODGING.

It was not the chaise of timorous-hearted Mr. Tew, but of hot-tempered Sir Humphrey Dutton, which the young highwayman had so valorously bidden to halt.

At the last moment Mr. Tew had been accosted by an old friend whom he had not seen for a number of years, and had been easily persuaded to put off his departure for another hour in order to talk over bygone days, and discuss a jorum or two of punch with him.

Our young friend was not long in coming to himself, and mightily surprised and discomposed he was at finding his waist firmly encircled by a sinewy arm, and to dimly discern a pair of eyes gazing intently into his own—his head was reclining on the stranger's shoulder—through the orifices of a crape mask. He was bareheaded, and his own mask had come unfastened and had fallen off. For a moment or two he felt dazed, and could not make out what had happened to him. Then in a flash he recalled everything. With a quick, resentful movement he drew himself away from the stranger's clasp, and set his back as stiff as a ramrod. For all that, his cheek was aflame with blushes, but the kindly night hid them.

"Thank you very much," he said in freezing accents, "but I am all right now. I was never taken like it before, and trust I never shall be again. It was too ridiculous."

"Let us hope that you were more startled than hurt," said the other. "For all that, it was a close shave."

With that he swung himself off his horse, and, going a

yard or two down the road, he picked up the youngster's hat and mask.

"There's a bullet-hole through the brim," he remarked, as he handed him his property. "Yes, a very close shave indeed." Then, as he proceeded to remount his horse, he added with a mellow laugh, "If an old professor may venture an opinion, you are a prentice hand at this sort of business."

"Yes, indeed. This is my first adventure of the kind, and I am quite sure it will be my last. If you are under the impression," he continued, with a touch of hauteur which seemed to become him naturally, "that the object of my adventure to-night was merely the replenishing of my pockets by the emptying of those of somebody else, you were never more mistaken. My intent was not money or jewels, but to obtain possession of a will—of a most iniquitous will—the destruction of which would have the effect of righting a great wrong. Unhappily, my attempt has failed, and the wrong will never be righted. I mistook my man. The traveller in the chaise was not the person I was expecting. *He* has doubtless made up his mind to stay the night at Appleford."

"A very wise resolve on his part, considering how unsafe the King's highway is for honest folk after dark," retorted the elder man, with his careless laugh. "But tell me this, young sir. Even if you had succeeded in getting possession of the will and destroying it, what would there have been to hinder the testator from having a fresh one drawn up in precisely similar terms?"

"Merely the fact that he is given up by the doctors, and that, in the event of the first will having been destroyed, he would not have lived to have a second one drawn up and signed. At any moment he may breathe his last. Possibly he is dead already."

"Your heroic attempt to right a great wrong is of a nature to appeal to every generous heart. Such being the case, it will not, perhaps, be deemed presumptuous on my part to suggest that where you have failed it is just possible that I might succeed. Should you, there-

fore, be pleased to accept of my services, I beg to assure you that they are yours to command." Here he removed his hat and swept the youngster a low bow.

The other hesitated for a few moments, as hardly knowing in what terms to reply, but when he did speak it was with no lack of decision. "From the bottom of my heart I thank you, sir, for your offer, which I assure you I appreciate at its full value; but, for certain reasons which I am not at liberty to explain, it is quite out of the question that I should avail myself of it."

"In that case, there is nothing more to be said. Will it be deemed an impertinence on my part if I ask in what direction you are now bound?"

Neither of them had noticed a huge black cloud which had been gradually creeping up the sky, and which at this moment burst in a deluge of rain. As by mutual consent, the two men who had so strangely come together pricked up their horses and sought such shelter as the plantation afforded from the downpour.

Then said the younger man in reply to the other's question: "What I am anxious to do is to find my way into the Whinbarrow road, after which I shall manage well enough."

"Do you know the way to it from here?"

"No more than a dead man."

"It's an awkward road to hit on after dark, and you might flounder about till daybreak without finding it. In five minutes from now what little moonlight there's left will be swallowed up by this confounded rain-cloud, after which it will be as dark as the nethermost pit. On such a night for you, a stranger, to attempt to find the Whinbarrow road would be the sheerest madness."

"What, then, do you recommend me to do?"

"I will tell you. Not more than three miles from here stands a lonely house among the moors, Rockmount by name. Its owner, a solitary, is a man well advanced in years—a scholar and a bookworm. But although leading such a secluded life, his door is open day and night to any one who—like yourself—has lost his way, or who

craves the shelter of his roof on any account whatever. To Rockmount you must now hie you and put Mr. Ellerslie's hospitality to the proof: that you will not do so in vain I am well assured. I know the way and will gladly guide you there. Come, let us lose no more time. This cursed rain shows no signs of leaving off."

"But if this part of the country is so well known to you," urged the other, "why not direct me the way I want to go, instead of pressing me—and at this hour of the night—to intrude on the hospitality of a stranger?"

"There are two, if not more, very sufficient reasons why I am unable to oblige you in this matter," responded the other dryly. "In the first place, I could not direct you, as you call it, into the Whinbarrow road. On such a night as this no directions would avail you; I should have to lead you there, and plant the nose of your mare straight up the road before leaving you. In the second place, my way lies in an opposite direction. Matters of moment need my presence elsewhere, and before the first cock begins to crow I must be a score miles from here."

As if to bar any further discussion in the matter, he took hold of the bridle of the other's horse and, leading the way out of the plantation, started off at an easy canter up the road in the direction taken by the chaise. The younger man offered no opposition to the proceeding.

He seemed little more than a boy, and the night's adventures had fluttered his nerves. To go wandering about in the pitch-dark, hunting for a road that was wholly strange to him—not one of the great highways, which he could hardly have missed, but a narrow cross-country turnpike which had nothing to distinguish it from half-a-dozen other roads—was more than he was prepared to do. He felt like one in a half-dream; all that had happened during the last hour had an air of unreality; he was himself, and yet not himself. To-night's business seemed to separate him by a huge gap both from yesterday and to-morrow. His will was in a state of partial suspension; he allowed himself to be led blindly forward, he neither knew nor greatly cared whither.

Before long they turned sharply to the left up a rutted and stony cart-track, which apparently led right into the heart of the moors. Here they could only go slowly, trusting in a great measure to the instinct and surefootedness of their horses. The highwayman still kept hold of the other's bridle. The rain had in some measure abated, and a rift in the clouds low down in the east was slowly broadening.

Not a word had passed between them since they left the plantation. But now, as if the silence had become irksome to him, the man with the crape mask burst into song. His voice was a full, clear baritone :

" Oh, kiss me, Childe Lovel," she breathes in his ear ;  
" Night's shadows flee fast, the moon's drown'd in the mere."  
He turns his head slowly. " Christ ! what is't I see ?  
A demon rides with me !" shrieks Ellen O'Lee.

When he had come to the end of the verse, he drew forth his snuff-box, tapped it, opened it, and with a little bow proffered it to his companion.

The moon had come out again, dim and watery, by this time, and they were now enabled to see each other so far as outlines and movements were concerned, although the more minute points of each other's appearance were still to some extent conjectural.

" *Bien obligé, monsieur,*" replied the younger man, " but snuff-taking is an acquirement—I ought, perhaps, to say an accomplishment—to which as yet I cannot lay claim, and, in so far, my education may be said to be incomplete."

" 'Tis a necessary part of a gentleman's curriculum—a pinch of Rappee or good Kendal Brown serves at once to soothe the nerves, disperse the vapors, and enliven the brain. But you are young yet, my dear sir—*oh, les beaux jours de la jeunesse !*—and, with luck, have many years before you for the cultivation of a habit which, unlike other habits I could name, the older you grow the more quiet satisfaction you derive from the practice of it. Amid the straits and disappointments of life, when his fortunes are at their lowest, and his fairweather friends have fallen

one by one away, many a man draws his truest consolation from his snuff-box."

"You speak like one grown old both in years and experience," said the other laughingly. He was recovering his *sang-froid*, and, the failure of his enterprise notwithstanding, was beginning to enjoy the adventure for the adventure's sake.

The highwayman gave vent to an audible sigh. "Experience keeps a dear school," he said, "and 'tis only fools who fail to learn at it."

And so for a time they rode on in silence. Then said the younger man, "You seem to know your way hereabouts pretty well."

"The home of my youth was no great distance away, and, as a lad, I wandered over these moors and fells till I grew to know them, as one might say, by heart."

"Have we much farther to go, may I ask?"

"Another ten minutes will bring us to our destination." With that he proceeded to remove his mask and stuff it into one of his pockets.

For a little while they jogged along side by side without speaking. The tract of country they were traversing was wild and desolate in the extreme. On every side stretched the bare swelling moorland—bare save for the short sparse grass and the many-hued mosses which grew in its hollows and more sheltered places, but left naked its huge ribs and bosses of granite, which showed through the surface in every direction, and seemed to crave the decent burial which only some great cataclysm of nature could give them. Here and there at wide intervals a narrow track-way unwound itself like a dusky ribbon till it was lost in the distance. These rude by-roads had been in use for more centuries than history or tradition knew of, and served to connect one outlying hamlet with another. Over them from time to time paced great droves of cattle and sheep on their way to one or other of the frequent fairs which in those days, far more than now, brought the country-side together and formed one of the most distinctive features of English rural life.

"Here we are at last," said the highwayman, as an indefinite mass of black buildings loomed vaguely before them—for the rain was over and gone, and the moon was again shining in a clear sky—which presently, as they drew nearer, took on the shape of a long, low, two-storied house, with a high-pitched roof and twisted chimneys, and having a group of detached outbuildings in the rear.

As they reined in their horses a few yards from the low wall, which enclosed a space of rank and untended shrubbery, the younger horseman saw, not without a sense of misgiving, that the whole front of the house was in darkness. Not the faintest glimmer of light was anywhere visible.

"And do you mean to tell me," he asked in a low voice, for a sense of night and darkness was upon him, "that this desolate and out-of-the-world spot is any one's home?"

"It is the home of Mr. Cope-Ellerslie, as I have already remarked."

"How far away is Mr. Ellerslie's nearest neighbor?"

"Four good miles, as the crow flies. But he is a recluse and a student, and the loneliness of Rockmount was probably his main inducement for becoming its tenant."

"In any case, we are too late to-night to claim his hospitality. There is not a light anywhere visible."

"You mean that there's none to be seen from where we are standing," retorted the highwayman dryly. "But that's no proof Mr. Ellerslie's abed. He's a genuine night-bird, and often does not go to roost before daybreak, so busy is he over his studies of one kind or another."

At another time the younger man might have wondered how his law-breaking companion had acquired such an intimate knowledge of the habits of the recluse of Rockmount, but just then he had other things to think about.

"Follow me," said the highwayman, and with that he walked his horse round a corner of the house, to where a large bow window, invisible before, bulged out from the main building.

"That is the window of Mr. Ellerslie's study," he re-



sumed. "You can see by the light shining through the circular openings at the top of the shutters that he is still at work."

"That may be," rejoined the other, "but doubtless all his household are asleep long ago, and rather than disturb Mr. Ellerslie himself at such an hour I would——"

"What a fastidious young cock-o'-wax you are!" broke in the elder man. "Do you think I would have brought you here if there had been nobody but Mr. E. to the fore? As I happen to know, his old manservant never on any account goes to bed before his master. Him we shall find as wide awake as an owl at midnight. Follow me."

He led the way back to where a ramshackle, loosely-hung gate, merely on latch, gave admittance to a gravelled path which led up to a small carriage-sweep in front of the house, on reaching which, at the instance of the highwayman, they both dismounted. Then going up to the door, he lifted the massive knocker and struck three resounding blows with it slowly one after the other; after which, going back to his companion, he said, "Here, young sir, we must part."

"But not, I trust, before you have told me to whom I am indebted for the very great service you have rendered me to-night."

A bitter laugh broke from the other. "My real name," he said, "is that of a broken and ruined man, whom the world already has well-nigh forgotten. That by which I am customarily known nowadays is—Captain Nightshade, at your service."

The younger man showed no trace of surprise. "I suspected as much from the first," he said. "In this part of the country only one *gentleman* of the road does us the honor of taking toll of us. The rest are scum—mere vulgar ruffians, ripe for the gallows-tree."

"Sir, you flatter me"—with a grave inclination of the head. "May I, in my turn, if it be not deemed an impertinence, ask to whom I am indebted for an hour of the pleasantest companionship it has been my good fortune to enjoy for many a long day?"

"*My* name? Hum! I must consider. By the way, you remarked a little while ago, and very truly, that, as far as your profession was concerned, I was a prentice hand. Suppose, then, that you call me Jack Prentice. 'Twill serve as well as another."

"Mr. Jack Prentice let it be, with all my heart. 'Tis a name I shall not forget. Ah! here comes somebody in answer to my summons." And, indeed, there was a noise as of the undoing of the bolts and bars of the massive door, which, a few seconds later, was opened wide, disclosing a gray-haired serving-man in a faded livery, who stood there staring into the darkness, shielding with one hand a lighted candle which he carried in the other.

Captain Nightshade strode up to the door, and in his easy, off-hand way said, "You are one of Mr. Ellerslie's servants, I presume?"

"I be," answered the old man laconically.

"Then be good enough to present my compliments to your master, the compliments of a neighbor—hem!—and tell him there's a young gentleman at the door who has been belated on the moors and craves the hospitality of Rockmount for the remainder of the night."

Mr. Jack Prentice had followed close on the captain's heels, and, as the candlelight shone full on the latter's face, he had now, for the first time, an opportunity of seeing what the noted highwayman was like. What he saw was a long, lean, brown face, the face of an ascetic it might almost have been termed, had it not been contradicted by a pair of black, penetrating eyes of extraordinary brilliancy, and by a mobile, changeable mouth which rarely wore the same expression for three minutes at a time. His rounded, massive chin seemed a little out of keeping with the rest of his features, as though it belonged of right to another type of face. His high nose, thin and curved, with its fine nostrils, lent him an air of breeding and distinction. In figure he was tall and sinewy. His black hair, tied into a queue not more than half the size of his companion's, showed no trace of powder. His prevailing expression might be said to be one

of almost defiant recklessness mingled with a sort of cynical good-humor. It was as though into an originally noble nature a drop of subtle poison had been distilled, which had served to muddy and discolor it, so that it no longer reflected things in their true proportions, without having been able to more than partially corrupt it.

The old man-servant's lips worked as though he were mumbling over the message with which he had been charged, then with a curt nod he turned away, and, putting down his candlestick on a side table, was presently lost to view in the gloom of the corridor beyond the entrance-hall.

If Captain Nightshade had any consciousness of the brief but keen scrutiny to which he had been subjected, he failed to betray it. While they were awaiting the man's return, he slowly paced the gravelled sweep, singing in a low voice a snatch of a ditty the last line of which had something to do with "ruby wine and laughing eyes."

Then the serving-man came back.

"The master bids yo welcome," he said. "There's supper, bed, and breakfast at yore sarvice. He's busy just now, but mayhap he'll find time to see yo for a few minutes by an' by."

"I felt assured you would not claim the hospitality of Rockmount in vain," said Captain Nightshade. "And now, my dear Mr. Prentice, I must wish you a very good-night, coupled with the hope that sound sleep and pleasant dreams will be yours. I have a presentiment that we have not seen the last of each other, and my presentiments generally come true."

He would have turned away, but the other held out his hand. "I am your debtor for much this night," he said. "You say you have a presentiment that we shall meet again. When that time comes I may, perhaps, be able to repay you. At present 'tis out of my power to do so."

Their hands met for a moment and parted, and each bowed ceremoniously to the other. Then Captain Nightshade climbed lightly into his saddle, waved his hand,

gave rein to his horse and disappeared in the darkness. The same instant a second servant appeared from somewhere, and, taking charge of Mr. Prentice's horse, led it away towards the rear of the house.

Then, with such a throb of the heart as one experiences on stepping across the threshold of the unknown, doubtful of what one may find on the other side, our young gentleman stepped across the threshold of Rockmount and heard the bolts and bars of the great door shot one by one behind him.

## CHAPTER III.

## MR. ELLERSLIE OF ROCKMOUNT.

HAVING resumed possession of his candlestick, the old serving-man, whose face wore a sour and suspicious look, beckoned Mr. Jack, and, leading the way, presently threw open a door at the end of a corridor, and ushered him into a spacious panelled room, in the grate of which a cosy fire was burning.

"Supper's bein' got ready, sir, and will be served in the course of a few minutes," said the man, and with that he lighted a couple of wax candles on the centre table and two more over the chimney-piece. Then he stirred up the fire to a blaze and hobbled out of the room without a word more.

Mr. Jack's first action was to relieve himself of his sodden cloak, which he laid over the back of a chair. That done, he spread his chilled fingers to the blaze, and proceeded to take stock of his surroundings.

This was soon done, for the room held nothing calculated to arrest his attention or excite his curiosity. It was sparsely furnished, and its few chairs and tables, together with the bureau in one corner, although of choice workmanship, were all venerable with age. Carpet and hearthrug alike were faded and in places worn threadbare. Of pictures or ornaments of any kind, except for a small malachite vase on the chimney-piece, the room was wholly destitute. Judging from appearances, it seemed clear that the master of Rockmount was not a wealthy man.

Scarcely had Mr. Jack concluded his survey before the door was opened, and in came a middle-aged woman,

carrying a supper-tray, which she proceeded to deposit on a centre table, and then wheeled the latter nearer the fire. The tray proved to contain a cold fowl, some slices of ham, butter, cheese, bread, and a bottle of claret. To our young friend, ravenously hungry and chilled to the marrow, it seemed a supper fit for the gods.

"Will you please to ring, sir, when you are ready for your coffee?" said the woman. And then he was left alone.

Not till half an hour had gone by did he ring the bell, by which time his spirits had gone up several degrees. Intensely chagrined though he was by his failure to secure that for which he had risked so much, there was a relish about his adventure which he appreciated to the full, which appealed at once to his imagination and to the unconventional side of a character which had often vainly beat itself against the restrictions and restraints by which it was environed. He felt that to-night was a night to have lived for. It would dwell freshly in his memory to the last day of his life. For the space of one hour and a half he had been hand-and-glove with Captain Nightshade, the most redoubtable highwayman in all the North Country; and if some people might think that was nothing to be proud of, it was at any rate something to remember. Whether he was proud of it or no, he was conscious of a secret sense of elation, into the origin of which he had no wish to inquire. He only knew that he would not have foregone the night's experiences for a great deal.

But the night was not yet over, although there seemed to be some danger of his forgetting that fact, so busy were his thoughts with the events of the last couple of hours. However, the bringing in of his coffee served to break up his reverie, and he began to wonder whether he was destined to see his unknown host. He was not left long in doubt.

"Mr. Ellerslie, sir, will do himself the pleasure of waiting upon you in the course of a few minutes," said the woman.

Together with the coffee she had brought in a case of spirits, with the needful concomitants for the manufacture of grog, without a tumbler or two of which, by way of nightcap, our great-grandfathers rarely thought of wending their way bedward.

While the woman cleared the table Mr. Jack went back to his chair near the fire. The blaze, as he bent towards it in musing mood, resting an elbow on either knee, lighted up a face that was very pleasant to look upon. In shape it was a rather long oval, the cheeks as smooth and rounded as those of a girl of twenty, with that pure healthy tint in them which nothing but plenty of exposure to sun and wind can impart; indeed, if you had looked closely, you would have seen that here and there they were slightly freckled. Add to this a nose of the Grecian type, long and straight, and a short upper lip with a marked cleft in it. His hair, which was brushed straight back from his forehead, so as to help in the formation of his queue, was of the color of filberts when at their ripest, with here and there a gleam of dead gold in it. His large eyes were of the deepest shade of hazel, heavily lashed, and with a wonderful velvety softness in them, which, when he was at all excited, would glow and kindle with a sort of inner flame, or, if his temper were roused—which it easily was—would flash with scornful lightnings, while the line between his brows deepened to a veritable furrow. For, truth to tell, Mr. Jack Prentice was of a quick and somewhat fiery disposition; a little too ready, perhaps, to take offence; with an intense hatred for every kind of injustice, and a fine scorn, for the little meannesses and subterfuges of everyday life, the practice of which with many of us is so habitual and matter-of-course that we no longer recognize them for what they really are.

But if Master Jack was a little too ready, so to speak, to clap his hand on the hilt of his rapier, he never bore any after-malice. His temper would flare out and be done with it with the suddenness of a summer storm, which has come and gone and given you a taste of its quality almost before you know what has happened.

But we shall know more of "Jack," generous, loyal, and true-hearted, before we have done with him.

The door opened and Mr. Cope-Ellerslie came in. His guest stood up and turned to receive him.

The master of Rockmount was a tall, thin, elderly man, apparently about sixty years old, with a pronounced stoop of the shoulders. His outer garment was a dark, heavy robe or gaberdine, which wrapped him from throat to ankle. His long, grizzled hair, parted down the middle, fell on either side over his ears, and rested on the collar of his robe; the crown of his head was covered with a small velvet skull cap. He wore a short Vandyck beard and moustache, which, like his prominent eyebrows, were thickly flecked with gray. For the rest, his face, when seen from a little distance, looked like nothing so much as a mask carved out of ivory with the yellow tint of age upon it; but when, a little later, Jack was enabled to view it close at hand, it was seen to be marked and lined with thousands of extremely fine and minute creases and wrinkles, as it might be the face of a man centuries old. But there was nothing old about the eyes, which were very bright and of a singularly penetrative quality.

Jack started involuntarily when his own traversed them. Of whose eyes did they remind him? When and where had he seen that look before? Was it in some dream which he had forgotten till they supplied the missing link? If so, all else had escaped him.

Hardly, however, had he time to ask himself these questions before his host, advancing with a grave inclination of the head, said: "Welcome to Rockmount, young gentleman. I am happy to be in a position to extend to you the hospitality of my humble roof. You are neither the first nor the second who, having lost his bearings in this remote district, has found shelter here. You were fortunate in there being no fog to-night; at such times to be lost on the moors is not merely unpleasant, but dangerous. I am sorry my people were not prepared to put before you fare of a more *recherché* kind, but we are very isolated here, as you may imagine, and so few are my visitors that it



would be folly to prepare for people who might never come. For my own part, I may add that I am no Sybarite."

There was a peculiarly hollow ring about Mr. Ellerslie's voice, as though it reached one from out of the depths of a cavern; and yet it seemed to his guest as if there was a note of half-familiarity in it, as if he had heard it somewhere before—it might be long ago. But that, of course, was absurd.

While speaking, Mr. Ellerslie had advanced to the fire, and, motioning his guest to resume his seat, had himself taken possession of a chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

Then Master Jack made haste to express his gratitude for the hospitality so generously extended to him.

"Very prettily turned, young gentleman," said Mr. Ellerslie, with a nod of approval when he had come to an end. "You have good choice of words, and express yourself without any trace of that affectation which nowadays mars the speech of so many of our so-called bucks and young men of *ton*."

The blush of ingenuous youth mantled in Jack's cheeks for a moment or two. He could not help noticing—and in after-days it was a point which often recurred to him—that his host never smiled, that no flitting shade of expression ever changed the mask-like, bloodless features. They remained wholly unmoved in their set, waxen pallor.

"And now," resumed Mr. Ellerslie, "will there be any impropriety in my asking my guest to favor me with his name? But if, for any reason whatever, he would prefer to remain incognito, he has merely to intimate as much and his reticence will be duly respected."

Mr. Jack was prepared for the question, and he answered it without hesitation. "If, Mr. Ellerslie, we should ever meet in after-days, as I sincerely trust we may, and you should accost me by the name of Frank Nevill, you will find me answer to it."

"It is a name I promise not to forget. You seem to have got *my* name quite pat, Mr. Nevill."

Mr. Nevill, or Mr. Prentice, or whatever his real name was, laughed a little uneasily. "It was from the—er—gentleman who acted as my guide and brought me here that I learnt it."

"How you learnt it, my dear sir, is a matter of no moment, so long as you know it. But I am forgetting that the grog is waiting to be mixed. You will join me over a tumbler, of course?"

But this his guest politely but firmly declined doing. Mr. Ellerslie was careful not to press him farther than good breeding sanctioned, which, however, did not hinder him from mixing a stiff and steaming tumbler for himself. Having tasted it and apparently found it to his liking, he went back to his seat by the fire.

"You were good enough just now, Mr. Nevill, to express a hope that you and I might some day meet again. Such a meeting, although not beyond the bounds of possibility—as, indeed, in this world, what is?—hardly comes within the range of likelihood. You are just on the point of stepping into the arena—the struggle, the turmoil, the dust, the elation of victory or, it may be, the bitterness of defeat, lie still before you; while for me it is all over. I have come out of the fight with reversed arms, I have left the sweating crowd and its plaudits—plaudits never showered upon me!—behind me forever. Here, in this rude hermitage—somewhat bleak, of a truth, in winter time—I hope to pass the remainder of my days, as Mr. Pope so aptly expresses, it, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot.' Therefore, my dear Mr. Nevill, the chances are that after to-night you and I are hardly likely to meet again. To you belong the golden possibilities of the future, to me nothing but memories."

He stirred his grog, took a good pull at it, and then went on with his monologue:—

"Rockmount has now been my home for a couple of years, and I have no desire to leave it. Here I live in the utmost seclusion with my books and a few scientific instruments. An act of the blackest treachery drove me from the world, a ruined man, bankrupt in hope, in friend-

ship, in means, with not one illusion left of all those with which—but I weary you with my egotistic maunderings. Besides, the hour is late—I cannot expect you to be such a night-owl as I am—and doubtless you are hungering for your bed.”

Nevill protested, a little mendaciously, that he was not at all tired. Tired he was, but not sleepy. He would willingly have sat out the rest of the night with his singular host.

Presently Mr. Ellerslie, having finished the remainder of his grog, said, “By the way, towards which point of the compass are you desirous of bending your steps in the morning?”

“If I could only find my way to the Whinbarrow road, I should know where I was.”

“One of my fellows shall go with you and not leave you till he has put you into it. You have but to name your own hour for breakfast, and Mrs. Dobson will have it ready for you.”

He rose, as intimating that the moment for retiring had come. A light was burning in the entrance-hall, and two bed-candles had been placed in readiness, one of which Mr. Ellerslie proceeded to light.

At the foot of the stairs he held out his hand. It was a long, lean, sinewy hand, Nevill could not help noticing, and not at all like that of a man on whom age had in other respects set its unmistakable seal.

“I am one of those mortals who have an uncomfortable habit of turning night into day,” remarked the elder man as he clasped his guest’s fingers. “I usually sit up till dawn is in the sky, and, as a consequence, I sleep till late in the forenoon. As you tell me that you want to be on your way at an early hour, I had better, perhaps, say both good-night and good-bye here and now—Ah, a mouse!”

Frank Nevill gave a backward spring, and a little frightened cry escaped his lips. Next moment the blood rushed to his face, and he felt as if he could have bitten his tongue out for betraying him as it had.

But Mr. Ellerslie seemed to have noticed nothing. "We have not many such vermin, I am happy to say," he resumed after a momentary pause. "But these old country houses are seldom altogether free of them."

And so presently they parted.

Mrs. Dobson was awaiting Nevill at the head of the stairs. "Your room, sir, is the third door on the left down the corridor," she said. "At what hour would you be pleased to like breakfast?"

"Will eight o'clock be too early?"

"No hour you may name will be either too early or too late, sir."

"Then eight o'clock let it be."

Thereupon the woman curtsied, wished him a respectful good-night, and left him.

As soon as he found himself in the room indicated, and with the door not merely shut but locked, he sat down with an air of weariness, almost of despondency. Body and brain were alike tired out, yet never had he felt more wakeful than at that moment. Even had he been in the habit of trying to analyze his emotions, which he certainly was not, the effort to do so would have puzzled him just then. The bitter consciousness that he had failed in the endeavor for which he had risked so much was always with him, lurking, as it were, in the background of his brain. He felt it like a dull, persistent ache which never quite let go its hold of him, whatever other subject might be occupying the forefront of his thoughts. And then, there were all the other events of the day just ended, which——

He started to his feet. "I shall have to-morrow and a hundred to-morrows in which I shall have nothing to do but think, and think, and think. If I begin the process to-night I shall not sleep a wink."

As yet he had given neither a thought nor a glance to the room, but he now began to look about him with a little natural curiosity.

It was a somewhat gloomy chamber, the walls having been originally painted a dull chocolate color, which had

not improved with the passage of time. In one corner was a large four-poster bed, with furniture of dark moreen. The dressing-table of black oak was crowded with an assortment of toilet requirements and appurtenances, silver-mounted and of most elegant workmanship.

Then his wandering glances were arrested by something—a garment of snowy whiteness—which had been laid over the back of a chair. Mr. Nevill, crossing to it, took it up gingerly and opened it. It proved to be a fine lawn *chemise de nuit*, frilled and trimmed with beautiful lace—a garment such as a duchess might have worn, but certainly never intended to be worn by one of the opposite sex.

Our young friend dropped it as if it were a red-hot cinder, and, sinking into the nearest chair, covered his face with his hands. From head to foot he felt as if he were one huge blush.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SQUIRE OF STANBROOK.

BEFORE proceeding to narrate the sequel of the strange adventure of the *soi-disant* Mr. Frank Nevill, it may be as well that the reader should be made acquainted with the circumstances to which was owing his appearance on the King's highway in the character of an amateur Claude Duval.

At the time with which our narrative has to do, Mr. Ambrose Cortelyon, commonly known as Squire Cortelyon, of Stanbrook, an old family seat in one of the most northern counties of England, was well over his seventieth birthday. Thrown by his horse more than twenty years before, he had not only broken his leg, but three or four of his ribs into the bargain.

Surgical science in those days, especially in country places, was not what it is now. His leg was badly set, with the result that from that time he had been a partial cripple, who when he walked any distance alone, had to do so with the help of a couple of stout sticks, but who usually preferred the arm of his factotum, Andry Luce, and one stick.

Andry—of whom we shall hear more later—was a man of forty, with a big, shaggy head and the torso of an athlete set on the short, bowed legs of a dwarf. Further, he was dumb (the result of a fright when a child), a deficiency which only caused his employer to value him the more. He was clever with his pen and at figures, and kept the Squire's accounts and wrote most of his letters, for Mr. Cortelyon hated pen work, and besides suffered occasionally from gout in his fingers.

Finally, Andry filled up his spare time by dabbling in chemistry in an amateurish fashion, being quite content to experiment on the discoveries of others, and having no ambition to adventure on any of his own.

A full-length oil painting of Squire Cortelyon, taken a short time before his accident, and still in existence, represents him as a thin, wiry-looking man of medium height, close shaven, with a long, narrow face—a handsome face, with its regular, clear-cut features, most people would call it; cold, unsympathetic light-blue eyes, and a dry, caustic smile. His dark, unpowdered hair, cut short in front, is doubtless gathered into a queue, only, as he stands facing the spectator, the picture fails to show it. He is dressed in a high-collared, swallow-tailed, chocolate-colored coat with gilt buttons. His waistcoat is of white satin, elaborately embroidered with sprays of flowers. His smallclothes, tight-fitting and of some dark woven material, reach to the ankle, where they are tied with a knot of ribbon and are supplemented by white silk stockings and buckled shoes. Round his throat is wound a soft cravat of many folds; his shirt is frilled, and he wears lace ruffles at his wrists. He stands in an easy and not ungraceful posture, looking right into the spectator's eyes. In one hand he clasps his snuff-box, deprived of which life for him would have lost half its value.

Although Squire Cortelyon courted and loved a cheap popularity, at heart he was a man of a hard and griping disposition, whose chief object in life, more especially of late years, had been the accumulation of wealth in the shape of landed property. Even in early life he had never either hunted or shot, but, for all that, he subscribed liberally to the nearest pack of hounds, as also—but less liberally—to the usual local charities. Although he employed a couple of keepers, he did not preserve too strictly, a fact which tended to his popularity among his poorer neighbors, while having an opposite effect among those of his own standing in the county. In point of fact, three-fourths of the game on his estates was shot

by his keepers and sent, under his direction, for sale to the nearest large town.

When Ambrose Cortelyon, at the age of thirty-five, came into his patrimony, it was not only grievously burdened with debt, but, as far as mere acreage was concerned, owing to extravagant living on the part of his two immediate progenitors, had dwindled to little more than a third of what it had been sixty years before. From the first the new Squire made up his mind that the follies of his father and grandfather should not be repeated in his case. From the first he set two objects definitely before him, and never allowed himself to lose sight of them. Object number one was to wipe off the burden of debt he had inherited from his father. This, by the practice of rigid economy, he was enabled to do in the course of eight or ten years, after which he began to save. Object number two was to become, in the course of time, a large landowner, even as his great-grandfather and his more remote ancestors right away back to the sixteenth century had been.

Thus, in the course of time it came to pass that Ambrose Cortelyon had become the owner of sundry considerable properties (not all of them situated in his own county, but none of them farther off than a day's ride) which, owing to one cause or another, had come into the market. Every season—and what was true then seems equally true to-day—brought its own little crop of landed proprietors who, owing to improvidence or misfortune or both, had fallen upon evil days, and whenever there was a likely property in the neighborhood to be had a bargain, the Squire, or his agent Mr. Piljoy, was always to the fore.

With the former it was an article of faith that, for one reason or other, landed property would rise greatly in value in the course of the next generation or two, and so constitute a stable inheritance for those to come after him. In so believing the prescience with which he credited himself was undoubtedly at fault. Many things were to happen during the next half-century of which



not even the most far-seeing of the statesmen of those days had the slightest prevision.

Squire Cortelyon was turned forty before he married. He fixed his mature affections on a banker's daughter, who brought him a dowry of ten thousand pounds, with the prospect of thirty thousand to follow at her father's demise. But three years later the bank in which Mr. Lowthian was senior partner failed, and the prospective thirty thousand went in the general smash. Such a loss to such a man was undoubtedly a terrible blow. A couple of years later still his wife died, leaving him with one child,—a son. He had felt no particular affection for her while living, and he was not hypocrite enough to pretend to mourn her very deeply now she was dead.

Ambrose Cortelyon was one of those men who never feel comfortable, or at home, in the presence of children, and as soon as Master Dick was old enough he was packed off to a public school, and for the next dozen or more years, except at holiday times, it was but little he saw either of his father or his home. From school he went to college, but with his twenty-first birthday his career at Cambridge came to an end. The life his father intended him for was that of a country gentleman, with, perhaps, an M.P.-ship *in futuro*. Where, then, would have been the use of wasting more time in competing for a degree which, even if he should succeed in taking it, would be of no after-value to him? Far better that he should spend a season or two in town, perfecting himself in his French meanwhile—the country swarmed with *émigrés* glad to give lessons for the merest pittance—and after that devote a couple of years to the Grand Tour. Mr. Cortelyon would have his son a man of the world, and neither a milksop nor a puritan. With his own hands he put a copy of "Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son" into Dick's valise. "A book to profit by," he said. "Let me adjure you to read and re-read it."

Dick felt more respect—which till he was grown-up had not been unmixed with awe—than affection for his father. All his life Mr. Cortelyon had been a reserved

and undemonstrative man, and averse from any display of feeling or sentiment. Still, that his son was far dearer to him than aught else in life, and that he looked with secret pride and hope to moulding him in accordance with his own views and wishes, can hardly be doubted. The mistake he made was in imagining that Dick was fashioned on the same lines, mental and moral, as himself; whereas the lad took after his mother in almost every particular. Easy-going, affable to all, led far more by his heart than his head, everybody's friend and nobody's enemy but his own—how was such a young man, with his handsome person, well-lined purse, and a certain element of rustic simplicity which still clung to him, to escape shipwreck in the great maelstrom of London in one form or another?

At any rate, Dick Cortelyon did not escape shipwreck in so far as the utter ruin of his worldly prospects was concerned. He had not been a year in town before he committed the unpardonable folly—unpardonable in the only son of Squire Cortelyon—of marrying a fascinating little actress of no particular ability, who at that time was playing "chambermaid" parts at one of the patent theatres for a remuneration of a guinea a week.

The marriage was kept by Dick a profound secret both from his father and his friends. But it had to be told the former when, some months later, he summoned Dick home on purpose to inform him that it was his wish—really tantamount to a command on the part of such a man—that he should "make up" to Miss Onoria Flood, the only daughter of a neighbor, and do his best to secure her before any other suitor appeared on the scene.

When the fatal news was broken to the Squire he bundled Master Dick out of doors without a moment's hesitation. There and then he took an oath that he would never forgive him, nor ever set eyes on him again, and he was a man who prided himself on keeping his word. At once he stopped Dick's allowance.

Some few years before these things came to pass, the Squire's grand-niece—grand-daughter of his sister Agatha

—an orphan left without means beyond a narrow pittance of eighty pounds a year, had come to live at Stanbrook, no other home being open to her. Although there was a difference of some six years in their ages, and although they had only met at intervals, they had been to each other like elder brother and younger sister. From the first Miss Baynard had conceived an almost passionate liking and admiration for her handsome, kind-hearted kinsman, and now that poor Dick was leaving home never to return, she contrived to have a stolen interview with him before he went. Although only just turned sixteen, she was in many things wise beyond her years, and before parting from Dick she obtained from him an address at which, he told her, a letter would at any time find him. Not being sure what his future movements might be, he gave her the address of his wife's uncle, who kept a tobacconist's shop in a street off Holborn. That done, Dick kissed her and went, and with his going half the sunshine seemed to vanish out of Nell's life.

At once Dick Cortelyon broke with his old life and all its associations. The fashionable world knew him no more: he disappeared, he went under. He took a couple of furnished rooms in an obscure neighborhood, and for the next few months his wife's earnings and the proceeds of the sale of his watch and trinkets kept the pair of them. But there came a time when his wife could earn no more; and then a son was born to him. In this contingency he deemed himself a fortunate man in being able to get a lot of copying to do for a law firm in Chancery Lane.

But poor Dick's trials and troubles—the fruit, as every reasonable person must admit, of his own headstrong folly—were not destined to be of long duration. When his child was about six months old he caught a fever, and died after a very short illness. One of his last requests was that when all was over his wife should write and inform Miss Baynard of his death. This Mrs. Cortelyon did not fail to do. Her letter conveyed the double news of Dick's death and the birth of his son.



"He gave her the address of his wife's uncle."

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Miss Baynard at once took the letter to her uncle. His sallow face became still sallower as he read the account of his son's death, but a frown deeper than the girl had ever seen on them before darkened his features by the time he had come to the end of the letter.

"Had Dick not been idiot enough to wed that play-acting huzzy," he said, "the lad would have been alive to-day. I owe his loss to her. Neither her nor her brat will I ever countenance or acknowledge. Tell her so from me. Stay, though; you may send her this ten-pound note, with the assurance that it is the last money she will ever receive at my hands."

A few days later the note was returned to the Squire through the post, accompanied by a few unsigned lines to the effect that the widow of Richard Cortelyon would accept no help at the hands of the man who had treated her husband with such inhuman cruelty.

Not long after this Miss Baynard wrote to the widow, to the address furnished by her in her letter, mentioning how attached she had been to Dick, and hinting delicately at the happiness it would afford her to send Mrs. Cortelyon a little monetary help now and again. But at the end of a fortnight her letter came back marked, "Gone away—present address not known," and enclosed in an official envelope. It had been opened and resealed by the post-office authorities. As it happened, the letter fell into the Squire's hands, who, noticing only the official envelope, opened it without perceiving that it was addressed to his niece. As a consequence he at once sent for her.

After explaining how it happened that he had opened the letter, he continued: "I am astonished and annoyed, Nell—very seriously annoyed—that, after what thou heard me say two or three weeks ago, thou should have chosen of thy own accord to communicate with this play-acting creature, and even to offer to help her out of thy own scanty means. Fortunately, the woman has disappeared. No doubt she has gone back to the life and the companions that are most congenial to her—curses on her for a vile baggage! To her I owe it that my boy lies moulder-

ing in the grave. Never again, Nell, on pain of offending me past forgiveness, do thou attempt to have aught to do with her. 'Tis beneath thee to notice such creatures in any way—and she above all others."

It was an injunction which Nell—who had listened to his tirade with a sort of proud disdain and without a word of reply—determined to obey or disobey as circumstances might determine. For the present she was helpless to do more than she had done. Unfortunately, she had mislaid the address given her by Dick at parting, otherwise she might perhaps have been able to obtain tidings of Mrs. Cortelyon through the latter's uncle, the London tobacco-nist.

## CHAPTER V.

## FAMILY MATTERS.

FOUR years passed away without bringing any further tidings of the widow and her child, during all which time their names were not once mentioned between uncle and niece. By the latter their existence was by no means forgotten ; she often thought about them, often longed to see them. Whether it ever entered the mind of Squire Cortelyon that he had a living grandson was known to himself alone. He grew old and made no sign.

Meanwhile Miss Baynard had shot up from a lanky slip of a girl into a very beautiful young woman.

When she first went to live at Stanbrook, the Squire, having no female element in his house of a higher status than that of housekeeper, engaged the services of Mrs. Budd—widow of the Rev. Onesimus Budd—for the dual positions of *gouvernante* and companion to his orphan niece. Mrs. Budd's duties as governess had long ago come to an end, but therewith she had assumed what to many people would have seemed the much more responsible and onerous post of chaperon. But, although a clever little woman in her way, Mrs. Budd was nothing if not easy-going. For her the wheels of existence were always well oiled. Nothing disturbed her much. Responsibility slid off her like water off a duck's back. Life for her meant little more than a sufficiency of sofas fitted with the softest cushions. She was excessively good-natured, and, hating to be worried herself, was careful never to worry others. She and her charge got on capitally together, chiefly because she was too wise ever to offer any very strenuous opposition to the whims and vagaries of that self-willed young woman. A mild protest, by way of easement to her



conscience, she did now and then venture upon, which, however, Miss Baynard would brush aside with as little effort or compunction as she would a cobweb.

To some of Squire Cortelyon's neighbors it seemed an inconsistency on his part that he, who had packed off his son to school at the earliest possible age, should have taken to his hearth, and have kept her there, an orphan niece of no fortune, when he might so easily have rid himself of her in the same way that he had rid himself of Dick. And certainly, as has been remarked, the Squire was no lover of children, and was generally credited with not having an ounce of sentiment in his composition. For all that, Miss Baynard stayed on at Stanbrook, knowing no other house, her great-uncle so far relaxing his ingrained parsimony on her account as to pay Mrs. Budd's salary without a murmur, and allow his niece a few—a very few—guineas a year by way of pocket-money.

Perhaps it might be said of Ambrose Cortelyon that he had never really cared but for one person, and that one his sister Agatha, who had been the solitary ray of sunshine that had brightened the home-life of his youth—a youth repressed and stunted, and thrown back upon itself, but in all higher respects uncared for, under the rule of a tyrannical and passionate father, who was accustomed to flog him unmercifully for the most trivial offences, and of an indifferent, cold-hearted mother, who left her children to vegetate in the country for three parts of the year, while she led the life of a woman of fashion in town.

But Agatha Cortelyon, in the course of time, had grown tired and sick of her life at home, and had ended by running away with, and becoming the wife of, an impecunious young lieutenant in a marching regiment. Thereafter brother and sister had never met. The young wife had died three years later, leaving one daughter, who in her turn had grown up and married, but who had never been acknowledged or recognized in any way by her mother's family. She also had died young, her husband having pre-deceased her, leaving one child, the Miss Elinor Baynard with whom we have now to do,

Not till then did Ambrose Cortelyon become aware of the existence of his grand-niece. He had heard at the time of his sister's death, but no further news having reference to her husband or child had reached him, nor had he ever felt the least inclination to seek for any. Thus, to find himself with a girl of twelve, of whom he had never heard, thrown on his hands was for him anything but an agreeable surprise. Immediately after her mother's funeral the child had been packed off to Stanbrook by some half-cousins of her dead father—who had neither the means nor the will to keep her—with almost as little ceremony as if she had been a Christmas hamper.

The Squire happened to be out riding when Nell was put down by the coach at the gate of Stanbrook, and it fell to Mrs. Dace, the housekeeper, to break the news to him on his return and hand him a letter from one of the half-cousins which the girl had brought with her. When, an hour later, the Squire, in response to Nell's timid knock at the library door, gruffly bade her enter, he was quite prepared to dislike her at first sight, and had already determined in his mind to at once pack her off to some cheap country school, and so rid himself, at any rate for some time to come, of her unwelcome presence under his roof.

Yet somehow he did neither one nor the other. Was it because he was struck by a vague, elusive something in the girl's eyes, her air, her manner, and the way she carried her head, which brought vividly to mind the half-forgotten image of the dead-and-gone sister of his youth, that his determination to send her away presently melted into thin air and never again took shape in his thoughts? In any case, from that day forward Stanbrook was Nell's home; but that its being so was due not so much to the mere tie of relationship, by which her uncle set no great store, as to a sentimental recollection on his part, was what she had no knowledge of and would have found hard to credit. She had grown up self-willed and high-spirited, and with no small share of that determination of character—some people, chiefly such as had come into contact with it, stigmatized it as sheer obstinacy—for which the

Cortelyons had always been noted. But above and beyond that, she had an intense scorn for all that was mean, base, sordid, or double-faced, and she was never slow to give expression to it.

For many of the small conventions and grandmotherly restrictions with which society at that period (leaving the present out of question) saw fit to hedge round its fledglings, she betrayed a fine indifference, going her own way without let or hindrance, and without deigning a thought to what others might say or think about her. That she should be regarded with favorable eyes by mothers with daughters about the same age as herself could hardly be expected. They averred that she set their darlings "a dangerous example"; but many of the darlings in question secretly envied her, and wished that a kind fate had allowed of their following her example.

Her uncle must be credited with allowing her to do pretty much as she liked. There was nothing strait-laced about the Squire. He was a strenuous hater of shams in others, while not being without a few little weaknesses of his own; and his niece's somewhat wilful independence of character secretly delighted him, even when, as sometimes happened, it opposed itself to his own flinty will, and sparks resulted from the collision.

Between two people so constituted there could be and was no question of sentiment. From the first it had seemed to Nell that her uncle simply tolerated her presence under his roof. He had taken her in because no other door was open to her, and because it would never have done for Squire Cortelyon's niece to have sought the shelter of the workhouse. His kindness, if kindness it could be called, had in it, or so she fancied, a certain grudging element which deprived it of whatever grace it might otherwise have had.

She knew nothing of a certain strange, haunting likeness on her own part, nor how often, when her uncle's eyes seemed to be watching her every movement, it was not her he saw at all, but some one known to her only by hearsay, who had been in her grave these forty years or more.

When Dick Cortelyon had been a little more than four years in his grave, the Squire, acting on his doctor's advice, went up to London for the purpose of undergoing a certain operation. It was an operation which is not usually supposed to be attended with any particular risk, and Mr. Cortelyon was quite cheerful about it; but of course in such a case, although he did not seem to think so, the question of age becomes an important factor. At this time he was within a month or so of his seventy-second birthday, but, barring his permanent lameness, the result of an accident a score years before, he avouched himself to be—and he fully believed it—as brisk and robust as when he was only half that age.

So up to town, accompanied by his niece, he travelled by easy stages in the roomy and comfortable, if somewhat lumbering, family chariot, which dated from his grandfather's time; while, perched in the rumble, Tatham, his body-servant, made platonic love to Miss Baynard's elderly maid, who had not known what it was to feel a man's arm round her waist for more years than she cared to remember.

Comfortable lodgings in Bloomsbury had been secured beforehand, and there the operation was presently performed by one of the most eminent surgeons of the day.

Everything went well with the Squire, as he had felt sure from the first it would do, and at the end of six weeks he was back at Stanbrook thoroughly cured.

But Miss Baynard, when she found herself in London, set herself a task she had hitherto had no opportunity of undertaking. This was nothing less than the hunting-up of her dead cousin's widow and child.

As already stated, she had lost the address given her by Dick, and had never afterwards found it. She remembered that the name on the slip of paper, that of Dick's wife's uncle, was McManus, and that the man was a tobacconist in a small way of business in one of the many turnings off Holborn, but the name of the street itself she had clean forgotten.

Fortunately for her purpose, there was a sharp youth

connected with the lodgings who, besides making himself generally useful indoors, was willing to run on errands of any and every kind for anybody disposed to pay for his services. Him Miss Baynard engaged to discover for her what she wanted to know; nor had she long to wait. Within a very few hours he placed in her hands the address of Mr. McManus.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A MAN WHO NEVER FORGAVE.

To the address thus obtained by her—her uncle being now well on the road to recovery—Miss Baynard went next afternoon in a hackney-coach, accompanied by her maid.

Mr. McManus, a little, old, and very snuffy man, with a shrewd but kindly expression, readily furnished her with the information asked for, after Nell had introduced herself and told him for what purpose she wanted it.

"Ah, poor lass! I'm sadly afraid she's not long for this world," remarked the old fellow with a melancholy shake of the head, in allusion to Dick's widow.

"Is she so ill as that?" queried Nell, thoroughly shocked.

"Aye, that is she. Long afore next year at this time the daisies'll be growin' over her grave. She caught a chill last Christmas, and it settled on her chest, which was always delicate, and now—why now, as I say, all the doctors in the world couldn't set her on her feet again."

"I cannot tell you how grieved I am to hear this. And the boy—her child—what of him?"

"Oh, he's as right as a trivet. A famous young shaver, and no mistake. There's nothing the matter with him."

Miss Baynard drove direct from Holborn to the address given her, which was Lawn Cottage, Chelsea. There Marjory Cortelyon rented a couple of rooms, a middle-aged widow, Mrs. Mardin by name, being at once her landlady and her nurse.

Nell, having sent in her name, was presently admitted to the invalid's little sitting-room, with its pleasant

outlook across a wide sweep of sunny meadows, long ago covered with bricks and mortar.

The ex-actress lay on a couch near the window, a frail figure, wasted by illness to little more than skin and bone. That she had been very pretty once on a time was still plainly evident, and in her large, lustrous eyes, sunken though they were, Nell read something which went direct to her heart. There had never been anything meretricious or tawdry about her, otherwise Dick Cortelyon would not have made her his wife. She had been good and pure, and, in her way, a lady.

Nell, after pausing on the threshold for a couple of seconds while she took in the scene, went quickly forward and, dropping on one knee by the couch, bent over and kissed the dying woman. Tears dimmed her eyes, and a few moments passed before a word would come. Indeed, Marjory was the first to speak. At the touch of Nell's lips her ivory cheeks flushed, and a lovely smile played for a few seconds round her mouth. "My Dick loved you very dearly, and no wonder," she said softly. "I have often longed to see you, and I'm sure I shall die happier now that I have done so."

Nell's visit lasted upwards of an hour. She explained to Marjory how it happened that she had been unable either to communicate with her or to visit her before. Greatly to her disappointment, young Evan was from home, he having been taken into the country to spend a few days with a married sister of Marjory's, but Nell was told that if she chose to come again in a week's time he would then be back, and this she promised herself that she certainly would do.

By and by Nell said: "And now, Marjory dear, you must allow me to renew the offer made by me in the letter which failed to find you. Although you do not see your way to accept pecuniary help from Mr. Cortelyon, there is no reason in the world why you should not accept it from me, and I am quite sure that if poor dear Dick could speak to you from the grave he would agree with all I say. That he left you very poorly off, although

through no fault of his own, I know full well. Therefore, I say again, why not——”

The sick woman held up one of her transparent hands. “You are kindness itself, Miss Baynard,” she said, “and were I in want of help, you would be the first person to whom I would appeal; but I am not in want of anything. I have everything I need, and more, thanks to the generosity of Mr. Geoffrey Dare.”

“Of Mr. Geoffrey Dare?” echoed Nell.

“Did Dick never speak of him to you?”

“Not to my knowledge; but you must remember that when Dick first came to London I was hardly out of the schoolroom, and that we saw very little of him at Stanbrook afterwards, before that last visit of all, with its unhappy ending.”

“Well, my husband and Geoff Dare—we always used to call him and speak of him as ‘Geoff’—were like brothers (not that all brothers hit it off together by any means), and of all Dick’s many fine friends he was the only that was in the secret of our wedding. It was a secret he told to nobody, and when Dick’s father cast him off and hard times came, he remained just the same Geoff that he had always been; not the least bit of change did we ever find in him. Then, when my child was born, nothing would suit him but that he must stand godfather to it. All through Dick’s illness, which lasted a matter of four months, he would leave his gayeties and engagements at the other end of the town—we were living at that time in a couple of rooms in Clerkenwell—and come two or three times a week to sit with him and cheer him up. And when all was over, it was his money that helped to bury my husband, and it was on his arm that I leaned as I stood by the grave-side—he and I by our two selves. Is there any one like him in the world, I wonder?”

She sank back exhausted; but a little wine and water which Miss Baynard proceeded to administer speedily revived her.

Then said Nell: “Judging from what you tell me, Mr. Dare must indeed be a friend among a thousand, and for



what he has done for you and yours I honor and respect him. Now, however, that you and I have found each other, there is no reason why you should any longer burden his generosity. You and I, my dear Marjory, are cousins; Dick and I, as you know, loved each other like brother and sister; consequently, it is to me, and to me only, that you and Evan ought to look in time to come."

A faint smile, it might almost be termed a smile of amusement, lighted up the sick woman's face. "'Tis very evident that you don't know Geoff Dare, or you would not talk like that," she said. "Why, merely for me to hint at such a thing would turn him into a thundercloud, and then there would be an explosion fit to bring the roof off. Oh, he has a fine temper of his own, I can tell you! And besides and worse than all, it would cut him to the quick, and that is what I would never be a party to doing. Then again, dear Miss Baynard, it isn't as if he was a poor man. In that case what you urge would bear twice thinking about. But Geoff is anything but poor, although—so Dick used to say—far over-fond of the gaming table and the race-course, like most young bucks of the day."

Nell sat silent, if not convinced. The ground, so to speak, had been cut from under her, and she was at a loss what to say next.

Presently Mrs. Cortelyon spoke again. "While we are talking about Mr. Dare, there is something else with which he is concerned that I may as well tell you about, as my doing so may perhaps prevent any misunderstanding in time to come."

She closed her eyes for a few seconds while she inhaled her smelling-salts. Then she went on:

"Although both the doctor and Mrs. Mardin try to keep the truth from me, I am not deceived. That my days are numbered, that a very few weeks will bring the end, I know full well—and Mr. Dare knows it too. The last time he was here I challenged him with the truth, and he could not deny it. It was the uncertainty about my child's future, which lay like a dead weight at my

heart, that impelled me to do so. But he—God bless him for it!—at once put my mind at rest on that score. He gave me his solemn promise that when I am gone he will act a father's part by his dead friend's child. He will bring up Evan as if he were his own son. That the boy is his godson I have already told you."

"But what if Evan's grandfather should some day change his mind and want to claim him?" The question sprang to Nell's lips almost before she knew that it had formed itself in her mind.

An angry light leapt into the young widow's eyes; a spot of vivid red flamed out in either cheek. For a moment or two she bit her nether lip hard, as if thereby to control her emotion. Then she said: "If I thought there was any likelihood of my darling ever falling into the hands of that cruel and wicked old man, I am quite sure that I should never rest in my grave. Oh, if only, when I am dead, I may be allowed to haunt him! But you do not think, do you, dear Miss Baynard, that he is ever likely to want to claim Evan?"

"One never can tell what may happen. Even the most self-willed people sometimes see reason to change their mind. My uncle is an old man, and Evan is his lineal heir. He has neither child nor grandchild but him. What more natural than that he should some day turn round, hold out his arms, and say: 'The past is dead and buried. Come to me. You belong to me and to me only. I am rich, and all that I have is yours?' What is to hinder such a thing from coming to pass?"

Mrs. Cortelyon remained silent for a few moments as if considering the picture thus presented to her. Then she said: "When Geoff comes next I must talk to him about it. You have frightened me. Neither he nor I have dreamt of such a possibility. When I am dead the child must disappear, he must be hidden away by Geoff where the Squire, should he ever want to do so, could not find him. Rather, I truly believe, could I bear to see Evan stark in his coffin than walking hand in hand with that flinty-hearted old man. I never hated any one in my

life as I hate him, and I shall keep on hating him after I am dead."

Miss Baynard paid two more visits to Lawn Cottage before the time came for her and her uncle to go back to Stanbrook. Evan was at home on both occasions, and on both occasions they went together for a long walk. The boy took to her from the first. He was a handsome, healthy child, and—or so it seemed to Nell—wonderfully like what his father must have been at the same age. She would have liked dearly to take him and set him down suddenly in front of the Squire, and leave the rest to Nature's prompting, but such a course was out of the question. All she could do was to extort a promise from Mrs. Cortelyon that if that should come to pass which she herself asserted to be inevitable, and the boy before long be left motherless, then should she, Nell, be informed, either by Mr. Dare or Mr. McManus, where he could at any time be found, and should be allowed to have access to him as often as she might feel disposed to claim the privilege.

When the time came for the two women to say good-bye, both knew that the parting was a final one, but not a word was said by either to that effect. Both feigned a cheerfulness which was the last thing in the heart of either, and it was a relief to both when the ordeal was over and the door shut between them. Then came the time for tears.

Before leaving town Nell paid a second visit to Mr. McManus, and got him to promise to write to her as soon as all was over. It was a promise the old tobacconist faithfully kept, and Nell had only been six weeks back at home when the fatal tidings reached her.

After a little time given to tears in the solitude of her room, she dried her eyes and went in search of her uncle. She found him in the library, dusting and gloating over one of his cases of coins. He looked up sourly as the door opened. When so engaged he did not like being interrupted, but for that Nell cared not at all.

Walking directly up to the table, she said without preface: "Uncle, news has just reached me of the death of poor Dick's widow. She died of consumption three days ago."

The Squire dropped his duster, and, leaning back in his chair, grasped an arm of it with either hand, and turned his cold eyes full upon her.

"And pray, Miss Baynard, may I ask in what way the news concerns me?"

He had not called her "Miss Baynard" since her last mention of her cousin's name more than four years before, and Nell did not forget it. But she was in no wise daunted.

"If you choose to consider that the death of your son's wife is no concern of yours, so be it. That is a matter between yourself and your conscience. But, in case the fact should have escaped your memory, I may be allowed to remind you that Dick left a child behind him—a son—who is now both fatherless and motherless."

"And what have I to do with that?"

"Everything. He is your grandson, your sole descendant, your natural heir. He is flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone, and ought to be dearer to you than all the world beside. Poor Dick died years ago. Why avenge his fault, if fault it was, on his innocent child? Think, uncle, think and——"

He brought down his fist heavily on the table. "Think, girl, say'st thou? Zounds! there's no need for me to think. My mind was made up long ago, and nothing thou can'st urge will move me from it. I tell thee, my grandson is no more to me than the veriest beggar's brat that crawls in a London gutter. Never will I acknowledge him, or have aught to do with him in any way. And if thou hast any regard left for me, or any care for my displeasure, thou wilt never speak of him in my presence again. As thou ought to have found out by now, I am a man who never forgives."

## CHAPTER VII.

## WHO SHALL BE HEIR?

FROM that day forward Ambrose Cortelyon seemed to regard his niece with a certain amount of suspicion and distrust, but it was a distrust that found no expression in words, and although Nell was conscious of an undefinable change in her uncle's manner towards her, she was wholly at a loss to what cause to attribute it.

The Squire was a man who expected those of his household, and all who were in any way dependent on him, not merely to believe as he believed, but to share his conviction that whatever decision he might come to in any given set of circumstances was the right one, and that all who differed from him were, theoretically, either fools or worse. In short, he was one of that numerous class who have a firm belief in their own infallibility in all the concerns of life; and as he was an autocrat in his own domain, with nobody to contradict him, it was not to be expected that his opinion of himself would become less confirmed with advancing years. When, therefore, his niece chose to impugn his action in a certain affair—and he now called to mind that it was not the first time she had done so—and even to imply, not by her words but by her manner, that his treatment of his grandson, or, to speak correctly, his absolute neglect of him, was both cruel and unjust, he was not, at any rate at first, so much angered as amazed at her audacity in daring to set up her feeble girl's will in opposition to his own, and, indeed, at her presumption in venturing to question his decision in any way.

Nor, when he came to think the matter over at his leisure, did his surprise, not unleavened with resentment,

diminish. He told himself that he could not have believed it of her; she had hurt him in a tender place, and he felt as if she could never be quite the same to him again as she had been in the past: and she never was.

It is just possible that the Squire's little smoulder of resentment against his niece would gradually have died out had he not been beset by a certain underlying consciousness, of which he vainly strove to rid himself, that all through Nell had been undeniably in the right and he indisputably in the wrong. Had he but seen his way to overlook his son's *mésalliance*, and have brought him and his wife to Stanbrook, in all probability Dick would still have been living. And then, with regard to this grandson of his, this child of a play-acting mother—— But when he got as far as that in his musings his passion seemed to choke him. No, he had done right, quite right; no other course was open to him. Come what might, he would never acknowledge the brat. His blood was tainted; he was no true Cortelyon. But all his arguing with himself did not suffice to pluck out the hidden thorn; it was still there, rankling in his flesh. But if he could not get rid of it, no one save himself should know of its existence, and he swore a great oath that in the matter of his grandson he would not go back from his word.

A day or two after her interview with her uncle Nell replied to Mr. McManus's letter. What she wished him to do was to inform Mr. Dare that he need be under no apprehension that Mr. Cortelyon would claim his grandson or interfere in any way with the boy's future. She further asked to be informed of the latter's address when Mr. Dare should have settled upon a home for him.

To this the old tobacconist replied in the course of a week or two. What he had to tell her was that for the present Mr. Dare had decided to let Evan remain at Lawn Cottage in the care of Mrs. Mardin; but that should he later think well to remove the child, Miss Baynard should be duly advised of the change.

And there for the present the matter rested.

When Squire Cortelyon found himself once more at home, he went back to his old mode of life with an added relish. He knew now that he had just escaped a great danger. He had been led to believe that the operation he was advised to undergo was of a very simple nature, but a casual remark of the great London doctor, which he chanced to overhear, had served to open his eyes after a very uncomfortable fashion. In reality, the operation was anything but a simple one, in view of possible consequences in the case of a man of threescore years and ten. However, all is well that ends well. The dreaded consequences had not developed themselves. He had come back home feeling a new man, with every prospect of a renewed lease of life, and he smiled grimly to himself to think how "that scoundrel of a Banks"—his local medico—had succeeded in thoroughly hoodwinking him.

So he went back to the old familiar routine as if there had never been a break in it, save that life seemed to have taken on an added sweetness now that he knew what he had escaped. He trembled when he thought of the risk he had run, not merely in one way, but in another, for had the operation had a fatal termination he would have died intestate (he had torn up his will after his quarrel with Dick and had never made another), in which case his detested grandson would have been his heir-at-law and have inherited everything. It was enough to put him in a cold sweat when he thought of it. Of course, the day would come when he could no longer defer asking himself the question, "To whom or to what shall I leave my property?" But it was an uncomfortable question to face, and a difficult one to answer; so, as there seemed no immediate need for answering it, he shelved it till what he chose to term "a more convenient time."

Pleasant to him were those long forenoons in the library, with no company save that of Andry Luce, who kept his accounts, looked after his rents, and to whom he dictated his correspondence. Pleasant it was, with the help of Andry's sturdy arm, to stroll slowly about the grounds,

watching the gardeners and laborers at their work, chatting with his bailiff, and giving his orders about this or the other.

Not less pleasant was it, when the fit took him, to have himself driven in his old shandrydan to one or other of his outlying properties, some of which lay many miles away, and satisfy himself that everything was going on as it should do, which meant so far as the interests of his own pocket were concerned.

But when the weather was bad, and he could not get out of doors, he had other occupations wherewith to engage his time. He was an ardent numismatist, and was very proud of his collection of coins and medals, to which he kept adding from time to time as opportunity served. He was also something of a bibliophile, and possessed a small but rather choice collection of rare books and illuminated MSS. He would gloat over these treasures as a miser gloats over his gold, and he derived the most intense satisfaction from the belief (which on no account would he have had disturbed) that his collections contained two or three absolutely unique specimens in the way of coins such as no other cabinet could match.

And so some months passed away, and no such person as young Evan Cortelyon might have been in existence for any mention of him between uncle and niece.

Then, as the winter crept springward, the Squire became unpleasantly conscious that his physical powers were slowly, almost imperceptibly, declining. For some little time he succeeded in persuading himself that it was a mere temporary *faiblesse* from which he was suffering, due probably, in a great measure, to the moist oppressiveness of an unhealthy season, which was carrying off numbers of younger people than he. But when, at length, the weather vane on the stables veered from southwest to northeast, and stuck there day after day, as if it would never move again, bringing with it dry, sunny morns, and crisp, bracing nights, he was obliged to seek for some other excuse for his growing weakness. Not yet, however, would he give in and summon Dr. Banks.



Although the son on whom he had at one time built such hopes was dead and gone, not for years had existence been sweeter to him than it was just then, and yet, to all seeming, it was gradually but surely slipping away from him. He felt as if a great wrong were being done him. What was Providence about?

At length his weakness so far increased that he reluctantly authorized Andry to summon Dr. Banks, who had attended him, off and on, from the date of his accident, and in the course of years had extracted more guineas from his purse than the Squire cared to reckon up.

"You have been very remiss, Mr. Cortelyon, very remiss indeed," said the fussy little rural practitioner when he had completed his brief examination, and had listened to the Squire's recital of his symptoms. "You ought to have sent for me six weeks ago, if not earlier than that. There has been a serious lowering of the vital forces, and, at your time of life——"

"At my time of life! Damme! what d'ye mean? You don't mean to call me an old man, and I not seventy-three till next birthday! Zounds! I'm only just in my prime. Banks, you're an ass! It will be time enough for you to begin to hint at my age—only to hint at it, mind you—a dozen years hence."

Dr. Banks did his best, but his best in this instance proved of no avail. The diminution of strength still went slowly on. At length the Squire became too weak to go out of doors, even for a drive, and then after a time the day came when he was unable to leave his bedroom.

At Dr. Banks's request, that well-known physician, Dr. Mills, of Lanchester, was called into consultation, but all he could do, after making one or two minor suggestions, was to accord his full approval to the treatment already adopted by his colleague.

"I won't pay you your fee, doctor—hang me if I will, sir—till you tell me what you think of me," said the Squire in his masterful way when Dr. Mills was ready to go.

"Well, Squire, to be frank with you, I think your con-

dition a somewhat grave one. But while there's life there's hope, you know. Yes, yes, we mustn't give up hope on any account; and you could not be in better hands than those of my friend Dr. Banks."

"You would advise me to make my will, eh?" The cunning smile with which he leered up into the physician's face hid a terrible anxiety at the back of it.

The doctor pursed out his lips. "In such matters it is always advisable to be prepared, to take time by the forelock, as one may say. And in your case, Mr. Cortelyon, I am inclined to think—um—well, yes, that any testamentary arrangements you may have to make should not——"

"I understand," broke in the Squire with a wave of his hand. "Not a word more is needed. Here is your fee. I am obliged to you for your frankness; and so good-day to ye." He felt as if sentence of death had just been pronounced on him.

Yes, it was no longer possible to cheat himself with vain hopes of recovery. The dread fact that for him life's business was nearly over could no longer be ignored, and the sooner he clasped it to him and made himself familiar with its grim visage, the better it would be for him during the little time he could call his own. He had lately had private information from Piljoy that a certain property, on which for years he had set longing eyes, would be in the market before another twelvemonth was over, and yet he, Ambrose Cortelyon, would not be there to bid for it! Again he asked himself what Providence was about.

Still, however much he might rail and rebel in secret at the dark prospect before him, knowing all the while how childish and futile it was to do so, his hard face in nowise softened to those about him, and he betrayed no slackness of interest in any of the little everyday affairs that went on around him.

But another spectre, besides that grisly one which Dr. Mills's words had called up, began to haunt him, hovering round his pillow by night, and never being far from his



elbow between daybreak and dark. There was only one way of exorcising it, as he knew full well, and that was by making his will. The entail had been cut off in his grandfather's time, sixty years before. How hateful soever the necessity might be, it was one which could not with safety be much longer delayed, unless he wished that all he might die worth should go to his disowned and unknown grandson. Beyond him and Nell, so far as he knew, he had not a single living relative. Whom, then, should he make his heir? For him it was fast becoming the question of questions.

Oh, it was hard, hard, while he was still in what, rightly considered, ought to be looked upon as the prime of life, to have to part from the earthly possessions he loved so well, and which had cost him such long and painful scraping to accumulate! But there was no help for it; leave them he must; the fatal fiat had gone forth. At times, it may be, his heart sent forth an anguished cry for his dead son; but if such were the case, it in nowise served to mitigate the rancor, almost inhuman in its bitterness, with which he regarded the dead man's child. He had spoken no more than the truth when he said that he never forgave.

It was just about this time that the Hon. Mrs. Bullivant, having heard of his illness, drove over from Uplands to see him. The Squire had never been very popular among those of his own class, and even now, when he was reported to be in failing health, there were not many callers at Stanbrook. Such as there were got no farther than the entrance hall, for in each case the Squire, on the plea of illness, excused himself from seeing them, and probably the majority of them were as well pleased that he did so. But of the Hon. Mrs. Bullivant a special exception was made. She was shown up into his bedroom, where the Squire lay in his huge four-poster, propped up with pillows, and there she stayed for upwards of an hour. For this, however, there was a reason.

Mrs. Bullivant, when known to the world as Miss Onoria Flood, the only daughter and heiress of a wealthy

brewer, was the lady chosen by Mr. Cortelyon for his son's prospective wife. He and Mr. Flood were neighbors, so to speak, for only a short half-dozen miles divided Uplands from Stanbrook, and when once the subject was broached—by the Squire in the first instance—they were not long in coming to a quiet understanding between themselves. Then Mr. Flood dropped a hint of what was in the wind to Onoria, who was a dutiful daughter, and at once fell in with her father's views. After that, all the Squire had to do was to recall his son from London and break the news to him. To Mr. Cortelyon the match seemed an eminently desirable one. Although the brewer did not come of a county family, he was most respectably connected, having one brother an archdeacon, and another high up in the service of John Company. But the great attraction of all lay in the fact that on coming of age Onoria would be entitled to a legacy of twenty thousand pounds bequeathed her by her grandfather. Further, she would be her father's sole heiress (he had Flood's word for that); and as the brewer was of a gouty habit and somewhat plethoric withal, it seemed not unlikely that— Yes, in every way a most desirable match.

But we know what happened when Dick was told his father's goodwill and pleasure in the matter. However willing under other circumstances he might have been to fall in with the old man's views, he was precluded from doing so by the simple fact that he was already a married man. Thereupon followed the quarrel, and all that sad succession of events with which we are already acquainted.

But Onoria did not go long unwedded. Before six months had gone by she became the wife of the Hon. Hector Bullivant, the second son of Lord Cossington, an impecunious peer, whose estates were mortgaged up to the hilt. Neither affection nor sentiment had anything to do with the union. Onoria married for position, the Hon. Hector for money. Everybody who knew the young couple said that what followed was only what they had

prophesied all along, so easy is it to be wise after the event.

The Hon. Hector was a notorious gambler and *roué*, and within a couple of years of his marriage he had contrived to dissipate his wife's fortune to the last guinea. A few months later he came by his end in a drunken brawl, greatly to the relief of everybody connected with him, leaving behind him one child, a boy a little over twelve months old. Then the widow went back home to her father, taking her son with her. Not long afterwards Mr. Flood was carried off in a fit of apoplexy.

When his will was read it was a terrible disappointment to Onoria to find that, instead of coming in for everything, as she had all along been led to expect she would, she was merely left an income of six hundred a year, together with the Uplands estate, and that everything else was left in trust for her son. She had known that her father was not likely to be a long liver, and, backed up by his wealth, she had looked forward to a brilliant *rentrée* into London society at no very distant date, with, it may be, a second and more brilliant marriage in the background. It was, indeed, a terrible disappointment.

Mrs. Bullivant at this period of her life was what is generally understood by the term "a fine woman," that is to say, she was built on ample lines, and was of generous proportions. Later on she would tend to obesity. She was black-eyed and black-haired, with regular features of a cold, statuesque type, which, as she was essentially unemotional and a thorough specimen of ingrained selfishness, formed a fair enough index to her disposition.

Such was the woman who came one day to see Squire Cortelyon on what she had been given to understand was likely to be his death-bed. As a matter of course, she knew of the quarrel between father and son, of Dick's untimely death, and of his having left a widow and a child whom the old man refused to acknowledge or to recognize in any way. She and the Squire had not met since a little while before her marriage; still, it seemed

only what was due to good feeling and neighborly sympathy, more especially in view of what had happened in the past, that she should be desirous of seeing him once again before it was too late. If there was any other motive, or half-motive, at work below the surface, she would hardly have confessed its existence even to herself.

As already stated, the interview between her and the Squire lasted over an hour. By the time it came to an end the sick man was pretty well exhausted; still, he was glad, he was very glad, that he had seen her. Her visit had supplied him with a ray of light where all had been darkness before. She was a woman after his own heart—energetic, capable, a man as regarded business ability, of a like saving disposition and with an ambition similar to his own; that is to say, to become a great landed proprietor, or rather, that her son should become one when he grew up and came into his inheritance. He did not think that Flood had treated her as handsomely as he ought to have done. Still, Uplands was hers—a fine property, and one which could not have come into more capable hands.

Had the fates proved propitious, Onoria would have been his daughter-in-law; it was owing to no fault of hers that she was not; consequently she might, in a sense, be said to have a claim upon him. Why should he not leave her a life-interest in his landed property, the same, at her decease, to devolve upon her son, on condition of his adding the name of Cortelyon to his present one? But it was a project not to be hastily decided upon. He would think it over. And he did.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## "A WOMAN OF A THOUSAND."

ABOUT this time Tatham, the Squire's body-servant, fell ill, and at his own request was allowed to leave Stanbrook for awhile and go to stay with his married sister, who lived in the next county. Hitherto he and Miss Baynard had shared the duties of the sick-room between them, and as the Squire, instead of gathering strength, seemed to be slowly losing what little was left him, it was evident that some one must be found to fill Tatham's place during his unavoidable absence.

Now in the village—a populous and thriving one—the outlying houses of which lay within a bowshot of the park gates of Stanbrook, there dwelt at this time a certain Mrs. Dinkel, herself English, but the widow of a Dutchman who had formerly been head gardener at Heronscourt, the seat of Sir Willoughby Freke. Mrs. Dinkel had been left with enough to keep her comfortably in humble village fashion, but being at the time of her husband's death scarcely beyond middle age, and of an active disposition, she presently began to cast about for some way not merely of adding to her limited income, but of banishing from her life the idleness which her soul abhorred.

Being determined to find work, she took the first chance that came in her way, which was to nurse a young lady laid up with a virulent fever. And thus it fell out that within a couple of years of that time Mrs. Dinkel's name had become well known throughout a wide circle of provincial society as that of a woman with a born gift for nursing. Like many others of both sexes, she had not discovered her *métier* till late in life, but having once

found it, she stuck to it. Still, her services were not at the beck and call of anybody, nor were they to be bought merely by the offer of a certain number of guineas. She would only go out to nurse among gentlemen, or, as she termed them, "the quality," and whenever none of the quality stood in need of her services she preferred to stay at home with folded hands, doing nothing, till they should send for her.

When a message from Stanbrook one day reached her, she responded to it with alacrity.

To the Squire it seemed very inconsiderate on Tatham's part that he should choose to fall ill at such a time, but as he supposed there was no help for it, it mattered not a jot to him, he said, whom they supplied him with by way of temporary substitute. So, at the express instance of Dr. Banks, Mrs. Dinkel was sent for.

She was a woman of few words and strong nerve, who seemed never to require more than two hours' sleep out of the twenty-four. All her thoughts and attention were given to her patient; she moved about the sick room almost as silently as a shadow, and before long the Squire found her presence far more soothing, and her ministrations far more gentle, than those of Tatham had been. Nell took to Mrs. Dinkel from the first. They seemed to understand each other instinctively. The sick man was the bond between them. Each in her separate way had for the time being vowed herself to his service.

A few days later, and Mr. Cortelyon had finally made up his mind, bitter as the need for doing so was to him. But it was indeed high time that he should come to some conclusion, for the sands of life were now beginning to run very low indeed, and he knew it. What but a little while before had been a suggestion—not emanating from any outside source, but his own suggestion to himself—had now become a determination. To Mrs. Bullivant in the first place, and to her son after her, he would bequeath three-fourths of everything he was worth.

He was quite aware that, in the ordinary course of



things—his grandson being out of the running—his niece's claim upon him ought to have had priority of that of everybody else. And he told himself that it should have had if only Nell had been a clear-headed, sensible, business-like woman of the type of Onoria Bullivant. Unfortunately, she was nothing of the kind. Instead, her head was crammed full of high-flown, sentimental, and quixotic notions (he prided himself on having read her thoroughly), and he felt morally sure that if he were to leave her any large lump sum, say fifteen or twenty thousand pounds, by way of legacy, she would be quite capable, when she found that Master Evan had been left out in the cold, of making over a big slice, perhaps even the whole of it, for the benefit of the brat. Such a result as that must on no account be allowed to come to pass. What he would do was, to invest a certain number of thousands in her name in the Funds, just enough to bring in about three hundred a year, and allow her the interest to live upon. With such an income she could not do much harm, or what the Squire designated to himself as harm. Should she be fool enough to take the boy to live with her, and assume the responsibility of his future, why, she was welcome to do so. But owner of Stanbrook and Barrowmead, and of his latest purchase, that big property on the Yorkshire border, his grandson never should be.

Thus it one day came to pass that Mrs. Bullivant received a note written by Andry Luce, asking her, if convenient, to drive over next day to Stanbrook in time for luncheon, and take her son with her. The widow was a shrewd woman, and it seemed to her that such a note was capable of but one interpretation, and as she drove through the country lanes next day on her way to the Hall her heart beat high with hopes, which, however wanting in substance they might be, were none the less *couleur de rose*.

In point of fact, before causing his testamentary dispositions to be recorded in black and white the Squire was desirous of taking stock of the youngster whom he was proposing to constitute his heir. If he should prove to be

a weak, puling child, or betray any signs of delicacy of constitution, why, in that case that there would be good reason for reconsidering his decision.

As it turned out, the Squire had no cause for uneasiness on that score. Young Gavin Bullivant, who had just entered on his fifth year, looked as strong and sturdy as an oak sapling. He was a bright-eyed, apple-cheeked lad, both inquisitive and acquisitive by natural disposition, and not knowing what shyness meant. He was very like his mother, but more in expression than features, and at times one caught a far-off hint of something in his face, at once hard and cunning, which seemed curiously out of keeping with his years. It was as though a very old man—and not a good old man either—was peering at you from behind a beautiful mask of childhood.

"Not much likeness here to the late lamented—hey?" queried the Squire after a good stare at him, which the boy returned with interest.

Mr. Cortleyon had only met the Hon. Hector on one occasion, at a sale of some of Lord Cossington's stock, and had felt no desire to cultivate his acquaintance.

"It may seem like self-flattery to say so," replied Mrs. Bullivant with a complacent smile, "but both in looks and disposition dear Gavin takes wholly after me. Even his grandfather cannot help admitting as much."

Then the Squire proceeded to put several questions to the lad, which he answered with promptitude and aplomb. He betrayed no timidity in the presence of the sick man, although to many a child of his age the latter would have seemed a sufficiently formidable object, with his parchment-like skin, his hollow cheeks, his heavy, grizzled eyebrows, which seemed bent in a perpetual frown, and the strange half-fierce, half-pathetic eyes beneath them, in which the flame of life seemed to burn all the more strongly just now because it was so soon to be extinguished forever.

After that Gavin was planted in the big easy-chair, with a supply of sweet cakes to keep him quiet while

his mother and the Squire talked together in confidential fashion.

But it was not in Gavin to keep quiet for any length of time, and hardly had the last cake gone the way of the rest before he had slid from his perch to the ground, bent on a more minute inspection of the room and its contents than he had yet been able to give them. So, while the two elder people talked together in low tones, he went about his self-imposed task, examining this object and the other, opening every drawer that was unlocked in the big *escritoire* and making a study of its contents, and in all respects making himself thoroughly at home.

At the end of three-quarters of an hour Mrs. Bullivant rose to take her leave, for the Squire was showing signs of fatigue. There was upon her a sense of disappointment, for nothing of a confidential nature had fallen from the sick man's lips, and she was still at a loss to imagine not merely why she had been sent for, but why she had been asked to bring Gavin with her. Sick people are subject to strange whims, but surely there was something more than a whim at the back of Mr. Cortelyon's request to see her son!

The Squire's keen eyes seemed to be reading her thoughts. "Onoria," he said—and he was holding her hand as he spoke—"Onoria, I am about to make my will, a new one, for I destroyed the old one some years ago and I have sent for you to-day in order to tell you that it is my intention to bequeath you the sum of three thousand pounds. Nor will the boy be forgotten, as you will find when my testament comes to be read. No thanks, please—they would only worry me, and—and I can't afford to be worried nowadays."

Mrs. Bullivant raised the hand that was holding hers to her lips and kissed it. "Dear Mr. Cortelyon," she said, and for once her voice had, or seemed to have, a tremor in it, "although you forbid me to thank you for your act of noble generosity to me and my son, you cannot, at any rate, hinder me from remembering you in my prayers."



"His mother now produced the Squire's watch and appendages."

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A cynical smile lighted up the Squire's haggard face. Perhaps the picture of Mrs. Bullivant on her knees, returning thanks for a thumping legacy—for that was the form her remembrance of him would take, if it took any—struck him as being a trifle incongruous.

Next moment an exclamation escaped him. He had suddenly missed his big gold watch, with its pendant of seals and trinkets, which he was in the habit of keeping within reach on the little table by his bedside. That it had been there only a few minutes before he was fully convinced. Whither, then, had it vanished?

Mrs. Bullivant at once began a search for the missing article, but at the end of two or three minutes she gave it up as a bad job. Then her eyes fell on Gavin, who had gone back to his perch on the easy-chair, and had been watching her movements with much apparent interest. She new from previous experience that when he looked the most cherubic he was usually most in fault. It seemed to her that he appeared too unconscious to be wholly innocent. "Come here," she said, beckoning him with her finger. He obeyed without hesitation.

He had only lately been breeched, and very proud he was at having been emancipated from petticoats. Pockets had not been omitted from his jean trousers—cut short in the leg, as was the fashion, so as to leave displayed an amplitude of white stocking—and from one of them his mother now produced the Squire's watch and appendages. He flushed a little and threw a timorous glance at the sick man, but, on the whole, his mother was the more put about of the two.

"I cannot imagine what made him do such a thing," she said, with tears of vexation in her eyes. "But you may rest assured, dear Mr. Cortelyon, that I will not fail to chastise him most severely when we reach home."

But the Squire was sniggering. "I trust, Onoria, you will do no such thing," he said. "It was merely the trick of a child too young to know the difference between *meum* and *tuum*. The best course will be to overlook it

as if it were a matter of no consequence and so leave him to forget it. Indeed, I am rather glad than otherwise to have had such a proof of the young rascal's acquisitive faculty. It goes, I think, to prove that he will not grow up a prodigal like his father."

When his visitors had left him the Squire lay for some time deep in thought. At length he said, speaking aloud, for he had just taken his cordial and was alone: "The more I see of her, the more confirmed I am in my decision. Her views in all that relates to the great question of property are almost the counterpart of my own. She is a woman of a thousand. What an admirable daughter-in-law she would have made! If only that poor headstrong lad of mine had—— But why go back to that business even in thought? The past is dead and buried; we have now to deal with the present and to arrange for the future. I would give something to be able to see Onoria's face while she is hearing the will read. I told her about the legacy of three thousand pounds, but I said nothing about a life-interest in my landed estate. I have left that by way of a surprise, and what a joyful surprise it will be to her! Well, well, to-morrow I will send for Piljoy."

It was in the course of the afternoon of the second day after Mrs. Bullivant's last visit that Mr. Piljoy arrived at Stanbrook. He was genuinely shocked at the condition in which he found the Squire, whose confidential business agent he had been for more than a quarter of a century. The sick man's lamp of life had indeed flickered down to a very feeble flame. Evidently no time must be lost in having the all-important document drawn up and then signed and witnessed in due form.

So for a full hour or more the two men, lawyer and client, were closeted together in the latter's bedroom. The will itself, engrossed and ready for signature, was to be brought by Mr. Piljoy three days later.

The lawyer was to dine and stay the night at Stanbrook, as he had done many times before; and in order that he should not lack company, his old acquaint-

ance Mr. Herries, the vicar, had been asked to meet him.

Miss Baynard and Mrs. Budd honored the two gentlemen with their company at dinner, but left them to their own devices as soon as the meal was over. Then the lawyer and the vicar—the latter of whom was a jovial, fox-hunting parson of what we are accustomed to term "the old school!"—drew their chairs closer, in anticipation of a pleasant evening over their long pipes and a steaming bowl of punch, and in all likelihood they were not disappointed.

At ten o'clock the vicar's man came with a lantern to light his master home. By this time Mr. Piljoy was not quite so steady on his feet as he customarily was, and when Andry Luce brought him his bed-candle and proffered his arm to help him upstairs, he accepted it without demur, for he had sense enough to know that at his time of life it would not do to risk a fall. But, indeed, Andry had helped him in similar fashion on more than one occasion before.

Nor did the thoughtful Andry leave him till he had helped him off with his coat, waistcoat, cravat, gaiters, and shoes. He also wound up his watch, and placed it, together with his purse and bunch of keys, on the dressing-table. One of the abominations of those days, known as a rushlight, was left to burn itself away.

An hour later, Andry, minus his shoes, stole into the bedroom, having, earlier in the evening, taken the precaution to abstract the key of the door. The lawyer's measured, long-drawn breathing convinced him that he had nothing to fear. Inside the small valise Mr. Piljoy had brought with him he found the paper of instructions for the drawing-up of the Squire's will. To make himself master of its contents was the object of his nocturnal intrusion. Five minutes by the dim aid of the rushlight sufficed for his purpose. Then he put the paper back and went his way as silently as he had come.

Mr. Piljoy left Stanbrook immediately after breakfast, and without seeing the Squire again, travelling, as he always did on such occasions, by post-chaise.



## CHAPTER IX.

## CONVERGING THREADS.

IN the course of the same forenoon Andry Luce sought Miss Baynard with the view of making a certain private communication to her. Talking on Andry's part was, of course, done by means of his fingers, but long practice had made Nell an adept at reading the language of the dumb.

Andry, who retained no recollection of his parents, in his brooding, self-contained fashion had never really cared but for two people, to-wit, his young master, Dick Cortelyon, and Miss Baynard. One of them was dead, and to the other was now given a double measure of that love and devotion which had sprung full-grown from his heart the moment he first set eyes on her, and had burnt there with a steady, unflickering flame ever since. She was the secret goddess at whose shrine he worshipped daily. His love was unmixed with any taint of ordinary passion, and was as absolutely pure as that of a father for his child. It was the one well-spring of living water his maimed life knew. There was nothing in the wide world he would not have done, or have attempted, at Miss Baynard's bidding.

His object in seeing her this morning was to enlighten her with regard to the provisions of the Squire's new will, which Mr. Piljoy was to bring a couple of days hence for the purpose of having it signed and witnessed. He did not tell her through what channel he had obtained his information, and, naturally enough, Nell imagined that it was he and not Mr. Piljoy who had drawn up the instructions, or, at any rate, that he had been present at their specification by her uncle. But before

Andry's fingers, working although they were at their quickest, had got more than half through their tale, Nell's thoughts were otherwise engaged.

She was rendered terribly indignant, as Andry knew full well she would be, by the thought of the gross and cruel injustice of which Mr. Cortelyon meditated making his innocent grandson the victim. She was made both to love strongly and to hate strongly, and there was nothing she hated more than aught that savored of cruelty or injustice. She had loved poor dead and gone Dick as a younger sister loves a handsome, generous, kind-hearted elder brother, and it made her blood boil to think that *his* child should be treated as an outcast from the hearth to which he ought to have been welcomed as the pride and the heir.

But what could be done? How could the purpose of this most iniquitous will be defeated? She could discern no way—none. She was as helpless in the matter as a new-born babe. Tears hot and passionate were shed by her in the privacy of her own room. But of what avail are a girl's tears? They fall, only to be dried up as quickly as a summer shower.

Now, it so happened that about this time a certain peripatetic dealer in rare books, coins, and curios of different kinds, of whom Mr. Cortelyon had made sundry purchases at various times, called at Stanbrook on purpose to submit to the Squire a choice illuminated MS. of the fifteenth century, for which he was desirous of finding a customer. The price asked was a high one, but after a little haggling—he was too weak to hold out long—the Squire agreed to pay it rather than let the treasure go.

It was not so much that he had fallen in love with it on his own account, as he believed that in it he had secured a rarity, to possess which his friend Mr. Delafosse, who was also a bibliophile and a numismatist, but more of the former than the latter, would be willing to give in exchange a certain unique stater of Epaticcus which he, Ambrose Cortelyon, had long coveted. Although he believed himself to be so near his end, it seemed to him

that he should die happier with the precious stater shut up in his palm, and the knowledge that at last it was his own.

Yes, Nell should go to Dene House, taking the MS. with her and negotiate the exchange. She was already known to Mr. Delafosse, who was no stranger at Stanbrook, and, in point of fact, was a special favorite of the old collector. Dene House was some twenty-five miles away across country. She could go on horseback, accompanied by John Dyce by way of escort.

So great became his impatience that he would have her set out that very afternoon. The days were already long, and she could reach Dene House soon after sunset, stay there overnight—Mrs. Delafosse would give her a hearty welcome—and be back home before noon on the morrow.

So Nell was sent for, and the manuscript given into her charge. By this time her uncle's weakness had become so extreme that his wishes and instructions had perforce to be limited to a few whispered sentences. But Nell gave him to understand that she knew exactly what he wanted done, and he was satisfied. She would set out in the course of the afternoon, and be back by midday on the morrow.

About an hour later Dr. Banks arrived, accompanied by Dr. Mills. The Squire had expressed a wish to see the latter about once a week, and although all the doctors in the world could have done nothing for him, that was no reason why his whim should not be humored. But there was no need for a lengthened visit, and the pair had come and gone in the course of half an hour.

This was the day fixed for the return of Mr. Piljoy with the will, and about half-past two a post-chaise drove up, from which, however, there alighted not the lawyer himself, but his managing clerk, Mr. Tew. Mr. Piljoy, he reported, was laid up with gout, and unable to come, but he, Mr. Tew, was just as competent to see to the proper signing of the will.

Mr. Tew was not sorry to be told that the Squire was asleep and must on no account be disturbed. He was both

tired and hungry, and was glad to be able to put the hospitality of Stanbrook to the proof before having to attend to the business which had taken him there.

It was not till close upon five o'clock that he was summoned to the Squire's presence. The sick man was alone, propped up in bed as usual, but Andry Luce had been instructed to keep within hearing of his master's bell.

Mr. Tew, having explained the cause of his employer's absence, went on, at the Squire's request, to read the will aloud, slowly and deliberately, the testator giving a nod of approval at the end of each clause. Five or six minutes brought the reading to an end, and as he took off his spectacles Mr. Tew said: "I presume, sir, that your witnesses are in readiness?"

The Squire nodded. "Ask Andry to summon the gardener and the groom. They have been told to hold themselves in readiness," he whispered.

The two subordinates in question were not long in making their appearance, and very self-important, albeit somewhat sheepish, they looked. They did not know they had been chosen as witnesses because most of the older servants were legatees under the will, whereas they were not mentioned in it. Besides, it had been ascertained that they could actually sign their names, which, for persons of their class, was regarded in those days as a very considerable accomplishment.

Then Andry, who had charge of the proceedings, brought in the Squire's big leaden inkstand, together with a couple of quill pens, which he had cut and trimmed specially for the occasion. All being in readiness, Andry put a stalwart arm round his master, and held him in a firm support while the latter, with slow and painful elaborateness, wrote his name at the foot of the will, which Mr. Tew held for him in a convenient position. That done, the groom and the gardener in turn followed their master's example, not without many strange facial contortions as the pen travelled shakily over the parchment. Then they touched their forelocks and shuffled out of the room, glad the ceremony was over, and yet feeling themselves to be

much more important persons than they had been a quarter of an hour before. As they shambled downstairs they whispered to each other that they had set eyes on "th' owd Squire" for the last time. Of the contents of the document signed by them they knew nothing. They had been told it was their employer's will, and that was enough for them.

Mr. Tew was not allowed to leave Stanbrook till after dinner, nor, indeed, had he any particular desire to do so. He could not stay overnight, as Mr. Piljoy would have done, but so long as he was back at business by nine o'clock on the morrow, that was all that would be expected of him. He was carrying back with him the signed will, in an envelope sealed with the Squire's own seal, to be retained in the custody of his employer till the time should have come for it to be made public.

Mrs. Budd and he dined alone. He was told that Miss Baynard, to whom he had been introduced earlier in the afternoon, had in the meantime left the Hall on some private business for her uncle, and was not expected back till next day.

Shortly after seven o'clock, Mr. Tew, who was beginning to be a little muddled with the quantity of old port he had imbibed, bade Mrs. Budd an almost affectionate farewell (she was a widow, and, to his thinking, still a charming woman), climbed into his chaise, and was driven off on his return to Arkrigg.

Night settled down over the old house. In those remote country parts people kept early hours, and when the hall clock chimed the half-hour past ten the only light left burning in the Hall was the one in the sick man's room. Near it sat Nurse Dinkel busily knitting—for she could not bear her fingers to be idle—but watchful and alert, as she always was. The Squire did not like to be looked at as he lay there, and from where she sat she could not see him for the heavy curtains that shrouded the head of the bed, but the slightest movement of his fingers on the counterpane drew her to his side.

She was a woman of some education, and had a low and

pleasant voice, and as Mr. Cortelyon's nights were often restless and wakeful, he had got into the way of occasionally asking her to read aloud to him. Her doing so took him for a time out of the dungeon of his own thoughts and sometimes brought in its train the sleep he longed for.

So to-night, after lying awake for some time, as motionless as if he were already dead, he said, "Nurse!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I want you to read to me." His voice was still very feeble, but stronger than it had been in the afternoon; such fluctuations were frequent with him.

"Yes, sir. What would you like? Shall I go on with Mr. Pope from where we left off the night before last?"

"Aye, you can't improve on him. Draw back this curtain that I may the better hear you."

When the curtain had been drawn back Nurse Dinkel did not return to her chair, but stood there, looking at her patient, nursing an elbow in either hand.

"Mr. Cortelyon, sir," she said after a brief pause, "I have something on my mind which I wish most particularly to say to you, if you will kindly give me leave to do so."

"Surely, Mrs. Dinkel, I will listen to anything you may have to say. But don't stand there while you talk. Go back to your chair."

"Thank you, sir," she said, as she resumed her seat. "I will try not to tire you, although what I wish to say may at the beginning seem a bit tedious. You may or may not be aware, sir, that I have a son, Cornelius by name, who is now turned thirty years of age. When he was quite a boy—and a clever boy he was, though 'tis I who say it—the late Sir Willoughby Freke took a great fancy to him. In the course of time he went to London, at Sir Willoughby's expense, for he was bent on studying to become a doctor. And study he did to such good purpose that he passed all his examinations with flying colors. Hardly, however, had he obtained his diploma

before a very good offer was made him to go out to Java, where he has relations on his father's side engaged in business. It was an offer he felt bound to accept. That was ten years ago, and now he has come back to England and is not going abroad any more. His home will be in London, but before settling down there he has come to spend a little time with his old mother, from whom he has been so long parted. And now, sir, I come to the reason why I have taken on myself to trouble you with all these dry particulars.

"My son has brought a wonderful discovery back with him from the East. According to his account, it will cure certain diseases after all other medicines have been tried in vain, and, in some cases, will almost bring dead people back to life. What the drug consists of I cannot tell you, because that is my son's secret, and one which he would not think of opening his lips about even to me. All I know is that the chief ingredient is the powdered bark of a certain tree, of which he has brought a considerable supply back with him. Cornelius feels as sure as it is possible for a man to be of anything that he has only to introduce his discovery to the medical world of London to find himself on the high road to a big fortune. His heart is buoyed up not merely by hope but by certainty.

"Well, sir, no longer ago than last Sunday afternoon, when you and Miss Baynard were good enough to spare me from my duties for a few hours, I had a long talk with my son, and took the liberty of telling him about your illness. And what do you think he said, sir? Why this: 'If Mr. Cortelyon could only be persuaded into trying my drug, I feel sure that it would give him a new lease of life.' Those were his very words, sir—'a new lease of life.'"

The Squire lay silent for a little while. Then he said, "And it is your opinion that I ought to allow myself to be experimented upon by this vaunted remedy of your son?"

"Most emphatically it is, sir. Cornelius is no idle boaster; he always knows what he is talking about, and

he would not have said what he did without good reason. He tried the drug again and again in several desperate cases before he left Batavia, and in no instance was it a failure."

"But I am an old man, Mrs. Dinkel, and my case is not one of any particular disorder, but a gradual decay of the vital forces, which can have but one end—and that is now close at hand."

"Don't say that, sir, I beg. Who can say what wonder my son's remedy might not effect even in your case, as it has already done in those of others? It is true that neither Dr. Banks nor Dr. Mills seems able to do anything for you, but that is no reason why you should refuse the help now offered you from another source. My son knows your age within a year or two; I described to him all about your illness, and yet for all that, it is his deliberate opinion that he can give you a fresh lease of life."

Again the Squire lay for some time without speaking. "Only one quack the more," he murmured to himself with a touch of his old cynicism. "Well, why not? From the highest to the lowest they're quacks, every mother's son of 'em. As it is, I'm at death's door already, and if the fellow can do me no good, I'll defy him to do me much harm."

Then he said aloud: "D'you know, I'm half inclined to let this son of yours experiment upon me, if only to take some of the brag out of him and prove to him that in such a case as mine his wonder-working stuff is no more effectual than a dose of senna would be."

"Then you *will* try it, sir! That is all I ask. In any case, no harm can come of it."

"My own opinion exactly"—with a dismal attempt at a chuckle. "Yes, I agree to try it. Only, the affair must be kept secret; outside this room nobody must know about it, unless it be my man, Andry Luce. And now, when can this son of yours be smuggled into the house?"

"It's only a little past eleven o'clock, sir, and if you think you can spare me, I will go at once and bring him back with me. The servants are all abed, and my son



could come and go without one of them being a whit the wiser."

"That's a very good notion of yours, damme! Go at once, my dear woman; but first give me a drink of that cordial. I shall want nothing till you get back. And if I can coax that shy dog, Morpheus, to keep me company meanwhile, so much the better."

## CHAPTER X.

## THE SEQUEL OF MISS BAYNARD'S ADVENTURE.

It was with a bitter sense of helplessness that Miss Baynard continued to brood over the news brought her by Andry Luce. The knowledge that, with the exception of a certain legacy to herself and sundry small bequests to old servants, the whole of her uncle's wealth, both in land and money, would go to Mrs. Bullivant and her son, who were not even cousins six times removed, cut her to the quick. The amazing injustice of the thing, so to speak, struck her dumb. To think that a man who knew full well his span of life had dwindled to a few brief hours should, in cold blood, choose to perpetrate so black a sin—for in her eyes it was nothing less—was to Nell wholly inconceivable. And all for what? Merely because his son had married beneath him, and had thereby brought to naught a certain ambitious scheme on which his heart had been set. And now the innocent child was to suffer for its father's fault, if fault it were. Oh, it was monstrous—monstrous!

Of one thing she was quite sure: she would never touch her uncle's legacy. Every shilling of it should go to the boy. But what was such a pittance in comparison with the income which, when he should come of age, ought to be his of inalienable right? Yet his name was not once mentioned in the will! The last of the Cortelyons—bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh—might die in a gutter or come to the gallows for anything the old man cared. Such a revenge was more than human; it was fiendish, and could only have been prompted by the devil. Nell burnt from head to foot with a fine flame of indignation when she thought of these things, and for

the next forty-eight hours she could think of nothing else.

It was in the course of the second afternoon after Andry Luce had told her that she happened—herself unseen—to overhear the two doctors talking together as they stood for a few moments in the corridor after coming out of her uncle's room. "I give him three days at the outside," one of them said. To which the other replied: "Hum! I daresay you are right. But I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he were to go off in his sleep between now and to-morrow."

Nell gave one quick gasp, and a shudder ran through her from head to foot. She had known for some time what each day was bringing nearer, but to hear from the lips of those who knew that the end was so close came upon her with a shock, and for a moment or two made her feel as if she had suddenly come face to face with a skeleton.

It was the day Mr. Piljoy had promised to bring the will for the purpose of having it signed, and as she remembered this she could not help saying to herself: "If I could only get hold of it and destroy it, my uncle would hardly live to sign another in its stead, and Evan, as his grandfather's heir-at-law, would succeed to everything!"

Then a little derisive laugh at her folly broke from her lips. Get hold of the will, forsooth! Why, she would not be allowed to so much as set eyes on it. Her brain must be softening even to imagine such a thing.

About an hour later her uncle sent for her. It was in connection with the errand to Mr. Delafosse that he wanted to see her. Having received her instructions—given brokenly and in whispers—and had the precious MS. committed to her charge, she left the room. He gazed after her, a little wistfully as it seemed, thinking, perhaps, that she might have kissed him before going—for in his heart he loved the girl—as at another time she most likely would have done; but her proud, set face had never changed while he gave her his message, and when he had done she simply inclined her head and went. She

felt that even if she were never to see him alive again she could not forgive him ; but he did not know that.

About two o'clock Mr. Tew, in Mr. Piljoy's stead, arrived with the will. In the absence of Mrs. Budd, who had gone into the village, he was received by Miss Baynard, to whom he explained the nature of his business and apologized for his employer's absence.

Nell's heart grew cold as she listened. Why did not Providence intervene, and not allow so black a deed to be consummated? If only Mr. Tew's arrival had been delayed for two or three days—she would not have cared by what means—then would he have come too late, and all would have been well. As it was, she could but wring her hands in sheer helplessness.

She was going sadly upstairs to her own room (after seeing Mr. Tew planted in front of a pigeon pie), when an idea flashed across her brain which for a moment or two seemed mentally to blind her. But it was a notion at once so wild and extravagant that, after drawing one long breath, her hands went involuntarily to her head, and she said to herself, "My reason must be deserting me." For all that, she could not thrust the notion from her ; indeed, it had taken such a firm grip of her that when she reached her room she found herself under compulsion to sit down and face it, and, however bizarre and impracticable it had at first seemed, to consider it dispassionately from a common-sense point of view. The idea which had so startled her, and without any conscious leading up to it on her own part, was nothing less than, in the guise of a highwayman, to stop Mr. Tew when on his way back to Arkrigg and despoil him of the will.

When a young spark of nineteen or twenty, Dick Cortelyon, on the occasion of one of his brief visits at home, had attended a fancy ball in the neighborhood in the character of a gentleman of the road. In the wardrobe in his room upstairs—a room left untouched since the date of his quarrel with his father—the dress, wig, mask, pistols, and other items of his make-up on that occasion were stored to the present day, a fact which was within

Nell's cognizance. The picture of her cousin, masked and ready to set out for the ball, had impressed her girlish imagination very vividly at the time, and had often recurred to her memory since; and this recollection it must have been, acting through some sub-conscious channel, which, while asking herself despairingly how she could get possession of the will, had inspired her with the idea of turning highwayman in reality—for one night only.

We know at what decision she arrived. Instead of scouting the idea and casting it from her, as ninety-nine young women out of every hundred would have done, she determined, *côte que côte*, to put it to a practical issue. Whatever risks might be connected with, or follow on, the affair she was prepared to face, if only she could thereby insure the destruction of her uncle's iniquitous will.

Fortunately for her, when she came to consider, several things seemed to work in favor of her scheme, desperate as at first sight it had appeared.

In the first place, everything in the way of dress and accessories needful for the part she had made up her mind to play were there ready to her hand. In the second, John Dyce, who was to act as her escort, had known her from childhood, was devoted to her, and could be thoroughly depended upon to keep any secret she might think well to entrust him with. In point of fact, John had originally been one of her father's servants, and he it was who had brought her, a girl of twelve, to Stanbrook, where he had remained ever since, filling the part of man-of-all-work in the Squire's establishment. Then, again, it was a good thing, so far as her purpose was concerned, that a married cousin of John should be keeper of the first toll-bar on the Whinbarrow road, which was the road she would have to journey by on her errand to Mr. Delafosse.

For the last time she asked herself, "Shall I adventure it, or shall I not?" knowing all the while what the answer would be. By now the afternoon was so far ad-

vanced that she must no longer delay her preparations. She knew already that Mr. Tew would not set off on his return journey till dinner should be well over. She herself would start in the early dusk about an hour in advance of him.

She made it her first business to see John Dyce and have a little private talk with him. Next she invented an errand for her maid to a neighboring village which would keep that elderly damsel out of the way till after her own departure. Next came one of the most essential features of the programme she was bent on carrying out: the transformation of Miss Baynard into the guise of a young man.

The change was effected in due course, and a very handsome and dashing young blade she looked. She took a long survey of herself in the cheval glass, blushing and smiling as she did so. Nell was a tall, Juno-like young woman, and as her cousin Dick had been a somewhat slender, medium-sized young fellow, his clothes fitted her almost as if they had been made for her.

But servants have prying eyes, and not thus would it do for her to be seen leaving the house; besides, there was the risk of encountering some one in the village to whom her face was known. So, over her man's dress she now proceeded to put on certain articles of feminine attire, to wit, a long riding-skirt, and a mantle with a hood to it, the latter of which she drew over her head. It was a common enough costume for ladies travelling on horseback.

Into a couple of saddle-bags, which John Dyce had supplied her with, she had already stowed away a number of things. Then, when all was ready, she went down by way of the back staircase, and so out of the house, unseen by any one save a gaping kitchen wench. In the court near the stables were two horses in readiness, one of them being her mare Peggy, a birthday gift, two years before, from her godmother, Lady Carradine. John helped her into the saddle, then mounted his own horse, and two minutes later they were cantering down the avenue.

They rode through the village, and so on their way for a couple of miles or more till they reached a little wooded hollow somewhat removed from the high-road. There Nell, having doffed her riding skirt and hooded mantle (her hair having been previously brushed back from her forehead and fashioned into a queue), substituted for them the three-cornered hat worn by her cousin at the fancy ball, with, by way of overall, an ample riding cloak, well worn, which poor Dick had been used to travel in. These articles she produced from the saddle-bags. Neither was the mask forgotten. Although she had never seen Mr. Tew before that day, and then only for a few minutes, it would not do to leave the slightest opening for his recognition of her in the part she was bent on playing.

John, meanwhile, had been changing Peggy's side-saddle for an ordinary one. That done, he again helped her to mount. It was as well for Nell in her new character that her mare had been thoroughly trained, and that she was a fearless horsewoman. Whatever awkwardness or embarrassment she might feel at first the friendly night covered up; but presently she had other things to think of than any little hot and cold shivers of her own. In the holsters in front of her were stuck a brace of unloaded pistols. John's pistols, however, were fully charged.

How Miss Baynard sped on her hare-brained expedition has already been told: how she mistook the chaise of a stranger for that of Mr. Tew; how she was fired at, but escaped with nothing worse than a fright; and how the notorious Captain Nightshade appeared in the nick of time and acted as her guide as far as Rockmount, where, under the name of Mr. Frank Nevill (that of a cousin in India) she was made welcome, and found shelter for the night.

We left her just after Mr. Cope-Ellerslie's housekeeper had shown her to her chamber; and now that the two

threads of our narrative have been brought together we will take up her history from the following morning.

When "Mr. Frank Nevill" went downstairs he found an excellent breakfast awaiting him in the same room into which he had been shown overnight. He was waited upon by Mrs. Dobson, who expressed much concern at the smallness of his appetite. When the meal had come to an end she said, "At what o'clock, sir, would you like your horse to be brought round?"

"As soon as it can be got ready, for I am anxious to get on my way."

In ten more minutes he was in the saddle. In accordance with Mr. Ellerslie's promise, a serving-man on horseback was in readiness to show him the way as far as the Whinbarrow road. He did not part from Mrs. Dobson without asking her to convey to her master his warmest thanks for the hospitality which had been extended to him; nor did he forget to press a guinea into her palm, reluctant though she was to take it.

As he turned away from the house he gave it a long backward look. It was a two-storied domicile, plain to the verge of ugliness, built of roughly-hewn blocks of the dark gray stone of the country. Its walls were of great thickness, and it was roofed with huge slabs of slate, well fitted to withstand the fierce gales which assailed it during the winter months. It stood alone in the centre of a great plateau of stony, desolate moorland, which spread away on every side till it was lost in the distance. No other homestead or sign of man's occupancy or vicinage was anywhere visible. A narrow rutted lane, originally, no doubt, nothing more than a sheep track, passed close by it, seemingly coming from nowhere and leading to nowhere. Frank Nevill shuddered as he looked. What must it be like, he asked himself, to live there in winter? What man in his proper senses would think of building a house on such a spot? And yet Mr. Cope-Ellerslie seemed well satisfied to live there!

After traversing the lane for a matter of three or four miles, Frank and his conductor emerged on one of the



great highways running due north and south. Crossing this, they found themselves after a little while in a tangle of country roads, among which a stranger would infallibly have lost himself. Frank's guide, however, evidently knew every foot of the way, and at the end of a couple of hours, at a point where the cross-road they had been traversing debouched into one much wider, he pulled up his horse and said: "This is the Whinbarrow road, sir; six miles straight ahead will bring you to Dunthale Prior. Do you wish me to go any further with you, sir?"

They were almost the first words the man had spoken, and Frank, as in honor bound, had refrained from putting any questions to him.

He now dismissed him with thanks and a little present for himself. Twenty minutes later he drew rein and dismounted at the first toll-bar, at which place it had been arranged that John Dyce should await his arrival.

And there honest John was, and a glad man was he to set eyes again on his young mistress. Never before had he passed so wretched a night. Fear and anxiety had rendered him half crazy, and had put all thought of sleep out of his head.

As already stated, the keeper of the toll-bar was a cousin of John Dyce; and Mrs. Nixon, his wife, now proceeded to show "Mr. Nevill" into a neat little bedroom. It was the last time that young gentleman was seen by mortal eye. At the end of half-an-hour Miss Baynard—stately and gracious, but with a defiant sparkle in her eye which seemed to say, "Challenge me who dare!"—issued from the chamber and made her way downstairs.

Miss Baynard reached Dene House on the stroke of noon, where she was warmly welcomed by Mr. Delafosse and his wife. The old bibliophile proved to be quite willing to exchange his gold stater of Epaticcus for the rare MS. on vellum which Nell had brought with her. Although genuinely grieved to receive such a bad account of his old friend, he could not help reminding himself that there were several rarities in Cortelyon's collection the

possession of which he had long envied him. Well, we must all die some time, and as his friend's collection would be sure to come to the hammer, there would at length be a possibility of his becoming the owner of such articles as he especially coveted. All the more would they be valued by him for having been the property of a man he so highly esteemed.

After joining the Dene House family over their three o'clock dinner, Miss Baynard set out on her return, and, there being nothing this time to detain her on the road, Stanbrook was reached by dusk. As she rode up the avenue she glanced anxiously at the windows. Had the Squire been dead the blinds would have been drawn down. But there was no change in the usual aspect of the house, and it was with a relieved heart that she dismounted.

She went up to her uncle's room without delay when told that he had more than once asked for her. "There's a great improvement in him to-day, my dear," Mrs. Budd had said to her in the entrance hall. "Dr. Banks was quite struck by the change when he called this morning."

Nell found her uncle awake. His eyes met hers questioningly as she entered the room, but when she produced the coveted coin and placed it in his hand his face lighted up wonderfully. "Good lass! good lass!" he murmured. Then he gave a sigh of relief, and his lean fingers closed lovingly over the stater.

As to whether Miss Baynard's attempt to purloin her uncle's will was, or was not, under the circumstances morally justifiable, the writer wishes it to be understood that the point is one with which he considers himself in nowise concerned. His duty, as he apprehends it, is simply that of a recorder of facts, without taking on himself either to justify or condemn any actions, good, bad, or indifferent on the part of his characters, who are allowed to go their own way without let or hindrance, and as we all have to do, must accept and make the best of whatever consequences may result therefrom.

## CHAPTER XI.

## "LITTLE SHORT OF MIRACULOUS."

YES, as Mrs. Budd had told Miss Baynard, there was a decided change for the better in Mr. Cortelyon's condition, but by what means the change in question had been brought about was known to three people only—the sick man, his nurse, and the latter's son.

Cornelius Dinkel had gone to Stanbrook in obedience to his mother's midnight summons, taking with him a small quantity of his remedy, and had spent an hour with the Squire, unknown to any of the household.

He was a tall, sallow, dried-up man, who looked as if all the juices of his body had been sucked out of him by the heat of a tropical climate. He was thirty years old, but might well have been taken for a man of forty-five. Nobody would have ventured to call him handsome, but his expression was one of marked intelligence, in combination with considerable will-power and great tenacity of purpose.

"Mr. Cortelyon, my son," said Mrs. Dinkel, as she introduced the young doctor into the sick room.

Dinkel bowed gravely. The Squire blinked his eyes; he would have nodded, but had not strength to do so.

Then he said, speaking in a thin whisper, broken by frequent gaspings for breath: "Your mother informs me that you have brought some wonderful discovery back home with you, and she would fain cozen me into the belief that by means of it you can succeed in prolonging the life of a moribund like me. I tell you at once that I don't believe in your ability to do anything of the kind. No, damme! I'm too far gone for any hanky-panky of

that sort, and both Banks and Mills would simply dub you a quack for your pains."

Dinkel's face remained impassive. "Permit me, Mr. Cortelyon," he said, and with that he proceeded to submit the other to a brief but searching examination. Till it had come to an end no one spoke. Then taking up a position on the hearth with his back to the fire, and speaking in the tone of one who felt himself master of the situation, he broke the silence:

"Your case, Mr. Cortelyon, I find to be exactly such as my mother described it to me. That I can permanently cure you I at once admit to be an impossibility. You are too advanced in life, and your constitution is too nearly worn out, to warrant any such hope. But that I can succeed in prolonging your life for weeks, nay, it may well be for several months to come, I make no manner of doubt—such is the marvellous efficacy of the remedy I have brought back with me from abroad."

This, to a man who had every reason for believing that a few more hours would bring the end, was news indeed. Weeks—perhaps months—of life, when he had looked forward to being buried about a week hence! It was too marvellous to credit.

For a little while he was too overcome to speak. Then he murmured, and Dinkel had to bend over him in order to catch what he said: "I—I cannot believe it—I cannot!"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Cortelyon, I am not dealing in romance—heaven forbid that I should in such a case!—but in sober fact. There is a homely proverb which affirms that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I have brought with me a small quantity of my remedy. Will you permit me to administer a dose of it to you?"

Again there was a space of silence. The sick man's gaze was bent on the young doctor as if he would fain read him through and through, while his grizzled eyebrows made a straight line across his forehead. He liked the look of him; there was something in that strong,

earnest, plain face which inspired confidence. Compared with him, Dr. Banks looked like an amiable old woman.

"First of all, I should like to know what this so-called wonder-worker of yours is compounded of," he murmured, after a time.

Dinkel shrugged his shoulders. "Its chief constituent is the dried and powdered bark of the tatao tree—a tree indigenous to the island of Java. The other ingredients consist of sundry drugs in certain fixed proportions, the secret of which I am not at present prepared to divulge."

"Quite right—quite right. Very sensible on your part. You don't want to poison me, I suppose—hey?"

The ghost of a smile flitted across Dinkel's rugged face. "What should I gain by that, sir? Only the hangman's noose. I think you ought to credit me with a desire for lengthening your days, not for shortening them."

"It would puzzle you to make 'em much shorter than they seem likely to be," gasped the Squire, with a painful imitation of one of his old chuckles. "Well, well," he resumed, "I'll venture on a dose of this stuff of yours, not because I've any faith in it, mind you, but merely to take the cock-a-doodle out of you, and prove to you that you're not the wonderfully clever fellow you're inclined to crack yourself up as being."

Not for days had the Squire spoken so much in so short a time, and as the last words died from off his lips his eyes closed and he sank into a half swoon.

He could not have been in more competent hands, and before long he was brought back to consciousness. His first words, in a feeble whisper, were: "Give me the stuff; I'll take it."

From his waistcoat pocket Dinkel extracted a tiny phial, no bigger than his little finger, about three-parts full of a ruby-colored fluid, which he proceeded to empty into a dessert spoon.

"You won't find it at all disagreeable," he said, as he proffered the spoon and its contents to the Squire.

"It tastes not unlike the liquorice-root I used to be

fond of when a lad," murmured the latter half a minute later, and with that his eyes closed again.

Dinkel held up his hand, and for a little space neither he nor his mother stirred. Then said the young doctor, "He is asleep, and if all goes well, as I have every reason to think it will, he won't awake for five or six hours. I will go now, and return between six and seven o'clock."

As already stated, Dr. Banks, when he called as usual in the course of next forenoon, was considerably surprised at finding such a decided improvement in his patient's condition, when, according to all the rules and regulations of medical science, he ought to have been nearly, if not quite, in a state of collapse. "It's merely a flash in the pan—the sudden flare-up of a candle before it drops into darkness," he said to himself. "He's a wonderful old fellow, and I've evidently underrated the strength of his constitution."

But next day, and the day after that, a still further improvement unmistakably manifested itself. Dr. Banks rubbed his nose with his forefinger and was clearly non-plussed. On the fourth morning he was joined by Dr. Mills, who had been expecting from hour to hour to have tidings of the Squire's demise. He and Banks did not fail to discuss the case as they drove over to Stanbrook in the latter's gig, but neither of them could make head or tail of it, and certainly it was difficult for them to believe the evidence of their eyes when, on entering their patient's room, they found him seated in his easy-chair, propped up by cushions, and not only that, but dictating a letter in a firm voice to his secretary, Andry Luce.

He favored them with a curt nod, but did not otherwise notice them till he had brought his dictation to an end. Then turning with a sardonic smile, he said: "Good-morrow, gentlemen. Very pleased to see you, especially you, Mills. You find an unlooked-for change in me since you were here last week—hey? It's all your friend Jimmy Banks's doing. From the hour he changed my physick, now four or five days since, I began to mend. Why he didn't change it before, instead of letting me get down to

death's door first, the Lord only knows. But Jimmy always was a wag. Don't shake your pow in that way, sir; you know I'm speaking the truth. What grand weather for the crops we are having just now! I'm told that both my corn and my taties are coming on famously; but I hope to drive round in a day or two and see them for myself."

There was nothing to be done and very little to be said, and the two doctors cut their visit as short as possible.

Said Mills to the other after they had left the room: "What was the change of medicine he spoke of? What fresh treatment have you been subjecting him to?"

"To none at all, I give you my word. I am sending him the same mixture now that I was sending him three weeks ago—the one that you and I agreed upon. No single ingredient has been changed. In saying what he did he was only poking fun at us in his cynical way."

"Possibly at you, Banks, but certainly not at me," rejoined the other in his pompous way. "In any case, he's a very remarkable old man, and although I could not quite follow you in thinking that his vitality was at such a low ebb as you seemed to make out, I certainly did not credit him with the possession of the marvellous recuperative powers to which our eyes have just borne testimony."

"Humph! You seem to be blessed with a very short memory, Mills. Your own words on the occasion of your last visit were, 'I give him three days at the outside,' and that's just a week ago."

"Well, well; we are all liable to err, of course. Still, I'm afraid that I allowed my judgment to be in some measure led astray by your diagnosis. I ought to have subjected him to a more comprehensive examination than seemed to be necessary at the time. For all that, I cannot deny that his case is one of the most remarkable which has come under my notice. In short, I should hardly be going too far if I were to term his recovery, however temporary it may be, little short of miraculous."

Dr. Banks grunted. He was too indignant to reply in words. Only to himself he said, "I always set you down in my own mind as a humbug, and now I'm more convinced of it than ever."

As the reader will have rightly surmised, the marvelous change in Squire Cortelyon was wholly and solely due to the drug administered to him by Cornelius Dinkel. Already, as we have seen, he was able to sit up—although only for a short hour at first—and transact business; and each day brought its own small addition of strength and vital power. Soon he was able to go out on fine days for a drive, and a little later he even got so far as, with the help of Andry Luce's arm, to take short strolls about the grounds.

But this eminently satisfactory state of things could only be maintained on one condition: it was absolutely essential that a certain regulated dose of the wonderful drug should be administered to the patient daily. For the purpose of carrying out this arrangement Dinkel made a point of coming to the Hall every evening after dark, bringing the day's dose with him in a phial. He simply waited long enough to see the Squire swallow it, and then went his way.

Mrs. Dinkel remained at Stanbrook, nor, although he was so much better, would her patient listen to a word about her departure. Perhaps it seemed to him that so long as he could succeed in retaining her services he would have a firmer hold on those of her son. Besides, his man Tatham was not yet able to resume his duties.

So interested was young Dinkel in the case of Mr. Cortelyon that for the present he made up his mind to stay where he was. As his mother had told the Squire, the object of his life now was to take his discovery to London, and build up a fortune on the strength of it. But he was gifted with the patience, slow but sure, of his father's race, and was content to wait.

By this time it had got rumored about the country-side that the Squire's amazing recovery was due to Dinkel, or rather, to the effect of some magic compound he had



brought with him from abroad. Further, it was commonly reported that so long as Dinkel continued to practise his arts on the old man, the latter would not, or could not, die. Among others, the whisper went that the Squire had sold himself, body and soul, to the young doctor on condition of his life being prolonged till he was a hundred.

These rumors were not lessened by Dinkel's mode of life. He had fitted up an old shed at the back of his mother's cottage, and there he conducted his experiments. Strange-colored flames would often be seen issuing from its chimney after dark, and one or two bolder spirits, who had ventured to pry upon him, averred that they had seen him warming his hands at a big glass jar which gave off blue sparks when he touched it. Evidently he was a man to be both shunned and feared.

But the love of life burns strongly in us. Not merely are we desirous of prolonging our own existence, but the lives of those dear to us, and among the villagers were three mothers who, their children having been given up by the local doctor, went to Cornelius Dinkel as a last resource, and prayed him with tears in their eyes to try to save their little ones. He did try, and in two cases out of the three he succeeded.

Still, the country people, with their ingrained superstitious prejudices, fought shy of him, and regarded him with a suspicion that was largely mixed with dislike. "He's a man-witch, that's what he is," they muttered among themselves. If he could prolong "th' owd Squire's" life, why couldn't he save Molly Grigg's child?—and why didn't he try his hand on old Tommy Binns, who was only eighty-seven when he died?

## CHAPTER XII.

## A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

IN view of the astonishing and wholly unexpected change for the better in Mr. Cortelyon's condition, it became manifest to Miss Baynard that, even if she had succeeded in despoiling Mr. Tew of the will, her doing so would have been to no purpose, seeing that her uncle had lived long enough to make half-a-dozen others had he been so inclined. She could not help cherishing a faint hope that, now a fresh lease of life had mercifully been granted him, he would see fit to change his mind in the matter of his grandson, and, either by means of a codicil to his present will, or the drawing-up of a new will, repair, in a greater or lesser degree, the act of cruel injustice of which he had been guilty.

But as time passed on Nell's hope faded and died. No allusion to his will ever passed her uncle's lips, or she would have heard of it from Andry Luce. It seemed that he was satisfied to let it stand unchanged.

One day a brief letter from her godmother, Lady Caradine, was received by Miss Baynard. Her ladyship was up in town for a fortnight—her usual home was in Devonshire—and she wrote very pressingly to Nell to join her there during her stay.

This Nell was by no means loth to do; and as her uncle raised no objection to her going, but rather urged her to accept the invitation, she and her maid were driven over to Lanchester a couple of days later, where she booked two inside places in the London mail.

Nell was especially glad to find herself again in London, because she would now be enabled to renew her acquaint-

ance with young Evan, whom she had not seen since his mother's death.

But before going to Lawn Cottage, where, so far as she was aware, the boy was still domiciled, she deemed it advisable to call upon Mr. McManus, whom she found in nowise changed, but still as genial, as shabby-looking, and as snuffy as ever.

"Yes," he said in answer to a question, after he had ushered his visitor into a little parlor behind the shop, "the young shaver is quite well and hearty, or was so a week since, and is still in charge of Mrs. Mardin."

"And all the expenses in connection with him are still defrayed by Mr. Dare?"

"In that respect nothing is changed. I may, however, just mention that some time ago a report reached me—although, mind you, Miss, I can't tell how true it was—that between two and three years ago Mr. Dare came to the end of his tether—was ruined, in point of fact (no doubt gambling had to do with it), and had to give up all his fine acquaintances and leave London. But be that as it may, I have it from Mrs. Mardin's lips that the quarter's money for young Evan is always punctually remitted. He's one of those gentlemen, is Mr. Dare, whose word is his bond. I wish all so-called gentlemen were like him."

The old man paused to refresh himself with a pinch of his favorite mixture and then went on:

"I myself, on a fine Sunday afternoon, sometimes manage to get as far as Chelsea, in order to satisfy myself as to how the boy is getting on. Although Mrs. Mardin knows me for his great-uncle on the mother's side, that fact, at my request, has been kept a secret from Evan. From the first I made up my mind that I would not spoil any chance the boy might have of one day being acknowledged by his father's relations by putting my humble self in the way, and when you entered the shop just now, Miss, I was in hopes you had come to tell me that Mr. Cortelyon had changed his mind at last, and had sent you to fetch his grandson."

Nell shook her head sadly. "I am afraid there is no

present likelihood of my uncle doing anything of the kind. Up till now his feelings in the matter have undergone no change."

"And maybe he will go down to the grave without having known how sweet it is to forgive. Poor old gentleman, how I pity him!"

An hour later Nell despatched a note to Mrs. Mardin, telling her that she hoped to be at Lawn Cottage in the course of the afternoon of next day, and there the specified time found her.

Evan had by no means forgotten his "Aunt Nell," and she was made very glad thereby. But she had sent him so many presents of toys and other things from time to time that it would have been odd if he had not remembered her. To her he seemed to have grown more like his father than ever. If his grandfather would but once have admitted the lad to his presence, surely his hard heart would have softened at Evan's haunting likeness to the dead man! But, as the old tobacconist had said he would go down to the grave without having known how sweet it is to forgive.

Mrs. Mardin was nothing if not hospitable, and before long tea was served; nor were the toothsome buns for which Chelsea was famed forgotten. But scarcely had the first cup been poured out before Mrs. Mardin rose suddenly to her feet. Some one had just passed the window, and next moment there was a tug at the front-door bell.

"I declare if here isn't Mr. Dare!" exclaimed the widow. "What a strange thing that you and he should happen to come on the same day!" And with that she hurried out of the room.

Miss Baynard had often desired to make the acquaintance of this unknown benefactor of her dead kinsman's widow and child, and now her wish was about to be gratified. She stood up as the door opened, with a slightly heightened color, and with a heart that beat somewhat faster than common.

A second later every vestige of color fled her face, and

it seemed to her as if her limbs were on the point of giving way under her. She drew one long, gasping breath, and unconsciously her hand gripped the back of her chair, as if to keep herself from falling. In the man who now entered the room she had recognized—or she felt nearly sure she had—the notorious Captain Nightshade, he who had come to her help that night when she was reeling in her saddle after having been fired at by the unknown traveller in the chaise, and who had afterwards acted as her guide as far as Rockmount!

It was true that she had only had a clear view of his face for a few brief seconds, while the old serving-man stood at the open door with his lighted candle, but the picture thus seen had burnt itself into her memory as few things had ever done, and many a time since then had she conjured it up in fancy till its every lineament seemed to have grown familiar to her.

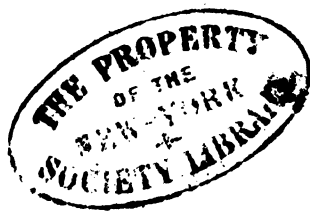
And now, marvel of marvels, here before her, a living reality, was the face she had never thought to see again—long and brown, with its thin, high-ridged nose, its delicate nostrils, its black, brilliant eyes, its mobile mouth, and its massive, rounded chin, together with that air of almost defiant recklessness which of itself would have served to mark the man out from his more commonplace fellows, and which seemed to sit so easily upon him. And there, too, had further proof been needed, was the tiny brown mole on the lower half of the left side of his face, which had caught her attention at the time, as a “beauty-patch” might have done on the cheek of one of her own sex.

She tightened her grip on the back of the chair, and their eyes met. Into his there came no flicker of recognition, no slightest evidence which betrayed any consciousness on his part that they had ever met before. His glance encountered hers with the clear, unwinking steadfastness of one stranger regarding another. His features were grave and composed; there was no start of surprise; the sallowness of his cheeks remained untinted by any faintest flush of color. Miss Baynard was bewildered. Could it be that he had known beforehand whom he was about to meet



“She had recognized the notorious Captain Nightshade.”

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and had schooled himself accordingly? But this was a question Nell had no grounds for asking herself.

The girl's perturbation and amazement passed unnoticed by Mrs. Mardin, whose eyesight was no longer what it once had been, and she now went through the office of introducing the young people in the fewest words possible.

Miss Baynard curtsied a little *gauchement*, which was not like her. Mr. Dare, with his hat pressed to his heart, made her a profound bow.

"I am indeed fortunate in finding here to-day a lady whom it has long been the chief desire of my existence to have the felicity of meeting."

Such a speech addressed nowadays by a young man to a young woman would seem, and rightly so, absurdly high-flown and unreal; but to our great-grandfathers and grandmothers it would have appeared nothing of the kind. They and their progenitors for generations had brought the art of compliment, especially as between the sexes, to a degree of perfection of which we, in these degenerate times, retain little more than the tradition. Very likely it was all very artificial and insincere, but the fair sex of a day which now seems so far removed not only expected it but liked it. If we have been brought up on sugared food, the taste for it generally clings to us through life.

If any doubt had lingered in Miss Baynard's mind with regard to the dual personality of the man before her, his first words would have finally dispelled it. She would have known his voice among a thousand. How many times since she first heard those full deep tones had she heard them again in her dreams? She would have blushed to tell how often had she cared, or been able to count them. Yes, the last shred of amazed doubt was gone. Had she encountered Dare in the dark and heard him speak, she would have whispered to herself, "That is the voice of Captain Nightshade, and of no one but him."

And yet he had not recognized her! But perhaps there was nothing to wonder at in that. So far as she knew he had had no opportunity of scanning her features as she



had of his, and probably had no curiosity to do so, besides which he had been unaware of her sex, and had parted from her as one man parts from another. To a man of his profession the adventure of that night would seem a tame little episode hardly worth the trouble of remembering. She was glad, she was very glad, that he had failed to recognize her, and yet—being of the sex she was—even while she told herself so she felt a bitter heart-stab. *She* would have known *him* again anywhere, and under any disguise.

But she put this thought from her, and drew a breath of reviving courage. Her blood began to flow again, and soon a strange gladness, for which she could not account, began to make itself felt at her heart.

Before this came about she had found words to reply to Dare's little speech.

"And I on my part, Mr. Dare, can say in all sincerity that I am very glad to make your acquaintance. I have long wanted to be able to thank you for your generous kindness towards both the dead and the living, and now the time has come when I can do so. But pray let us be seated."

Mrs. Mardin had discreetly withdrawn. She was sorry that all the good tea in the pot would be spoiled with standing, but such little mishaps cannot always be avoided.

Master Evan was in the garden, urging on his wild career on a big rocking-horse which his Aunt Nell had sent him by carrier the day before.

"Dick Cortelyon and I were very dear friends, Miss Baynard, as you are doubtless aware. When his premature death left those he loved on the verge of destitution, was it not the place of him he had honored with his friendship to come forward and shield them, in some measure at least, from the chill blasts of penury? This it has been my privilege to be able to do. 'Twas but little—very little—and had our places been reversed I feel assured that Dick would have done the same by me."

"There I agree with you; but such friendships are rare,

or so I am bidden believe. For all you have done in the past, Mr. Dare, I thank you from the bottom of my heart ; it is what not one so-called friend out of a hundred would have done. But from to-day his charge upon your generosity must cease."

A shade of perplexity passed across Dare's face. "Pardon me, Miss Baynard, if I fail to apprehend your meaning."

"What I mean is that my cousin's child must no longer be a burden on you, and that it devolves upon those to whom he is bound by the ties of blood to care henceforth for his future."

"A burden, Miss Baynard ! The word stabs me."

"Pardon me, I was wrong. It ought never to have passed my lips. I am very sorry."

Mr. Dare bent his head as accepting the apology, and, indeed, for once Nell looked almost abject.

"From your remark," said Dare, "I can only conclude that Mr. Cortelyon's hard heart has at length relented, and that he has made up his mind to acknowledge his grandson."

Nell shook her head. "I am sorry to say that nothing of the kind has come to pass. My uncle is still as much embittered against the boy as ever he was."

"Excuse me, but you spoke of those to whom the boy is bound by the ties of blood as——"

"Am I not bound to Evan by the tie of blood, Mr. Dare?"

"The fact is one which cannot be disputed. Then, you wish me to understand——?" He paused.

"That from now I charge myself wholly and solely with Evan's future. 'Tis what I have long wished, nay, determined to do, but till to-day you and I have never met." The last words had hardly passed her lips before a quick flush mounted to her cheeks. Unthinkingly she had given utterance to an untruth. They two *had* met before, although he seemed to be wholly unaware of the fact. But there was no possibility of recalling her words even had she been desirous of doing so. "And——and con-

sequently I have had no opportunity of making this known to you before." The break had only been momentary. Had he noticed it? She could not tell.

Dare's face darkened, and the line between his eyebrows became more marked. "I was certainly not prepared for this," he replied. "Had I had any prevision of what I was about to hear, much as I value my introduction to Miss Baynard, I think I should hardly have come near Lawn Cottage to-day."

Nell's eyes struck fire, and for a moment or two her teeth bit into her underlip; but when she spoke it was with no trace of temper.

"That was a very rude speech on your part, Mr. Dare, to address to a lady. But, under the circumstances, I can make every allowance for your feelings, and I am not going to take offence at it. The one thing I am sorry about in connection with this affair is that some such arrangement was not come to long ago."

"And I am grieved that it should ever be come to. It will cut me to the quick, I tell you plainly. When poor Dick lay on his deathbed I gave him my word that while I had a crust his boy should not want, and that I would do my best to make up to him for that stroke of ill-fortune which was about to rob him of a father's love and care. It was a promise which, as far as the exigencies and circumstances of my life would allow, I have striven to fulfil to the best of my ability. That life—my life—is a very lonely one, how lonely you cannot conceive, and in the course of time my dead friend's son has grown very dear to me. Yet now, Miss Baynard, you would come between us (how cruel in some things is your sex!) and would deprive me of him."

"You misapprehend my intentions, Mr. Dare. I have no wish to come between you and the boy in any way. You will have full freedom to visit him as often as you wish. All I say is, that henceforth all charges in connection with him must be defrayed by me."

Dare got up abruptly, crossed to the window, stared out of it for a few moments, and then went back to his seat.

"Look here, Miss Baynard," he said, "why should not you and I come to a compromise in this matter, as one finds it advisable to do in so many of the affairs of life? Suppose we share the expense—'tis a mere bagatelle after all. Come, now, what say you?"

Miss Baynard shook her head. "It cannot be, Mr. Dare. On this point my mind is finally made up. I am very sorry if my telling you so causes you any pain or annoyance, but there is no help for it. My action is based on reasons which I do not feel at liberty to explain. Your goodness in the past will never be forgotten by me, and I trust——"

"Not a syllable more, I beg," said Dare, with a queer little break in his voice. "My 'goodness,' forsooth! Reville me, strike me, but never fling that word at me again as applicable to anything between me and my dead friend! But I will urge you no longer. You tell me your mind is made up, in which case there is nothing more to be said or done."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## LOVE THE CONQUEROR.

ALTHOUGH Dare had not succeeded in persuading Miss Baynard to reverse or modify the decision she had come to in the case of her cousin's child, and although he was at no pains to hide his chagrin and disappointment, he and she did not fail to part as good friends are in the habit of parting. Neither of them had any wish to part otherwise, and it would have been hard to say which of them would have been the more sorry to do so; indeed, Nell was unwilling to say good-bye till she had obtained from him an address—that of a lawyer—to which she could write in case she should have occasion to communicate with him about the boy.

Both of them put the selfsame question to themselves within five minutes of their parting: "When and where, if ever, shall we meet again?"

Dare went direct from Chelsea to Holborn. Miss Baynard had said that her action was influenced by certain reasons which she did not feel at liberty to specify. Was one of those reasons based on the fact that he was now a ruined man? If so, through what channel had the information reached her?

Finding Mr. McManus as usual in his shop, Dare at once challenged him with being the tale-bearer. It was an accusation he made no attempt to rebut; but that in saying what he had to Miss Baynard he had been actuated by any feeling of ill-will towards Dare was too absurd a notion to be entertained for one moment. However, the mischief was done and could not be undone, and with all his faults Dare was not the man to vent his annoyance on so helpless an object as the old tobacconist,

But Miss Baynard had spoken as if there were more reasons than one for the decision she had arrived at. Might not another, and perhaps the chief one, lie in the fact that in him she had recognized the man who had been mixed up with herself in a certain memorable adventure, and who, when asked his name, had told her that he was none other than the notorious "Captain Nightshade"? It was a recognition he had not counted on, being unaware how incautiously he had afforded her the opportunity of scanning his features by the light of the serving-man's candle at the door of Rockmount. But that she had recognized him was an indisputable fact. Was it, then, to be wondered at that she should refuse in such positive terms to permit him any longer to defray young Evan's expenses with money which she doubtless regarded as the proceeds of robbery on the King's highway?

No, he felt bound to admit that it was not to be wondered at, and that, in point of fact, no other course was open to her. And yet, knowing him now to be that which he had told her he was, she had parted from him with a cordiality in which he felt assured there was no *arrière-pensée*. She had given him her hand frankly, and in her beautiful eyes he had read nothing but kindness, with just a hint of sadness, or so he fancied, shining through it. And then, what had her last words to him been? "Let us not say good-bye, but *au revoir*." And this to the man who had confessed to being Captain Nightshade!

But to attempt to follow the turnings and twistings of that incomprehensible thing, a woman's mind, was what he made no pretensions to doing. It was enough for him that her own lips had said *au revoir*; and that a propitious fate in its own good time would bring them together again he did not permit himself to doubt.

Dare had had no thought or expectation of finding Miss Baynard at Lawn Cottage; he had not even known that she was in town; consequently the meeting was as great a surprise to him as it was to her. But what he did know,

and had known all along, was that she and the *soi-disant* "Mr. Jack Prentice" were one and the same person. So piqued had his curiosity been by the adventure which had brought them together after such a strange fashion, that after her departure from Rockmount he had caused a watch to be set upon her movements till she had been traced back to Stanbrook. That she should prove to be the cousin of his dead friend, Dick Cortelyon, was merely one of those coincidences such as people who habitually keep their eyes open can see happening around them every day.

Dare had been quite right in his surmise as to the reasons which had actuated Nell in her refusal to allow him to contribute any longer, even in part, towards the cost of Evan's maintenance. The fact that he was a ruined man would of itself have been argument sufficient for the step she had decided upon taking. But when, in addition, she had to face the question, and it was one she could not shirk, "From what source is the money derived which is remitted every quarter-day to Mrs. Mardin?" she felt that no answer was needed from her. It was a question which answered itself. And this state of things had been going on for she knew not how long! Not another day must it last.

She had only been a couple of days back at Stanbrook when a small packet reached her through the post. It bore the London postmark, and was addressed in a writing wholly strange to her. She opened it, not without curiosity, to find that all it contained was the mask worn by her on a certain never-to-be-forgotten occasion. She had been unable to find it when, after reaching home, she proceeded to replace Dick's habiliments in the closet whence she had disinterred them. To the best of her belief she had inadvertently left it behind her in the bedroom at Rockmount, but it was a point as to which she could not be positive. Anyhow, here it was, sent back to her by an unknown hand, and her receipt of it in such fashion raised more than one perplexing question.

But supposing she was in error in thinking she had left

the mask at Rockmount? In that case only one conclusion was open to her—that it was not Mr. Ellerslie, but Mr. Dare, who had returned it. One or the other of them it must be. If Mr. Dare were the sender of it, how woefully in error she must have been in assuming that he had not recognized her when they met accidentally at Lawn Cottage! And yet, by not so much as the flicker of an eyelid had he betrayed any knowledge, or even suspicion, of their ever having met before! If he did recognize her on that occasion, then of course her secret—the secret of her sex—was equally in his keeping. Perhaps he had known or guessed it from the first! Had he not, when she reeled and all but swooned in the saddle, caught her in his arms? and had she not, with wandering senses, lain for a little while—a very little while—in his embrace! Was it then he made the discovery, supposing it to have been made at all?

Hardly had she asked herself the question before a delicious thrill went through her from crown to foot, and all the pulses of her being began to palpitate with a strange, new, sweet life, far sweeter than anything she had hitherto known. She felt as a chrysalis may feel when it bursts its husk and first spreads its wings to the sun.

She sat for some little time, her face hidden in her hands, although she was alone, and her veins aglow with something that almost frightened her. Then on a sudden her mood changed: she sprang to her feet, and with clenched hands and hard-set face took to pacing her room from end to end, doing silent battle with herself meanwhile. Never had she been so assailed before, and she brought all the forces of her womanly pride to bear on the insidious foe that was undermining her outworks one by one. She had deemed herself invulnerable; she had, as it were, set herself on a pedestal as a being apart, whom the one great weakness of her sex—for such it seemed to her—could never touch. And now nature was beginning to revenge itself by proving to her that she was no stronger in some ways than the weakest of her weak sisters. But she would not yield, she would not give way, she told



herself again and again with a sort of fierce despair, while conscious all the while that one bastion after another was crumbling before the enemy's assaults. "Shall not a woman remain mistress of her own fate?" she cried despairingly.

In some things she shall, my dear Nell, but not in all, as you are proving to your cost. There is a power within you that is stronger than yourself.

At length, sick and weary at heart, she cast herself on her bed and buried her face in the pillows. "Never, never will I submit!" she moaned. But even as the words escaped her some traitor in the garrison hauled down the flag which had flaunted itself so defiantly, and the citadel was won.

But who the sender of the mask was remained as much a mystery as before.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A FRESH ACTOR ON THE SCENE.

EXCEPT in a few occasional instances, Mr. Ambrose Cortelyon, who prided himself on his possession of an unbiassed mind, was not in the habit of being unreasonable either in his demands or his expectations, whether they concerned himself or others. Thus, he was quite aware that when his convalescence, so to call it, had reached a certain point and made no advance beyond it, it would be both useless and unreasonable on his part to look for any. Although Dinkel's marvellous drug could do much, it could not work miracles. He, the Squire, must not only be content, but must deem himself one of the most fortunate of men that such a measure of health had been given back to him as was now his, and henceforward his most fervent prayer must be for a continuance of it for an indefinite time to come.

Dinkel had held out to him the hope—nay, it had been next door to a promise—of a prolongation of his life for several months. What was there to hinder those months from extending themselves to years? He himself could see nothing in the way. Why should he not go on as he was going on now till his years had stretched themselves out to fourscore? Of course, he was only living a half-life, as it were; it was existence with sadly maimed powers, but only on such terms was existence possible to him at all. When we can't have what we would, the only wisdom is to content ourselves with what we have.

He was quite aware of his utter dependence on Dinkel, but on that score he had no fears. He knew that the young doctor meditated a removal to London before long; indeed, the contingency had already been discussed between them and provided for. Week by week Dinkel

would forward to his mother by coach a small packet containing seven phials, the contents of one of which would be administered to the Squire each day by Mrs. Dinkel, whose services had been exclusively secured by the payment of a wage far more liberal than she could hope to obtain elsewhere. Dinkel's own services were to be remunerated at the rate of one hundred pounds a month for as long a time as he should prove successful in keeping his patient in the land of the living.

Under these circumstances, the Squire could bear to look forward to Dinkel's proximate departure with tolerable equanimity.

Dr. Banks, at the Squire's request, still kept up his visits to the Hall, but he no longer came daily as of yore. At each visit the same little farce, which each knew to be a farce, was enacted between him and his patient. Having felt the latter's pulse and looked at his tongue, Banks would remark in his inanely amiable way: "We are going on famously—famously. Strength thoroughly maintained; total absence of febrile symptoms; temperature absolutely normal. I think we could not do better than keep on with the old medicine."

"Of course we couldn't, Banks," the Squire would respond with a chuckle. "It's wonderful stuff that of yours. Send another pailful along as soon as you like."

Then would Banks take his departure, knowing well that not one drop of his medicine would be swallowed by the master of Stanbrook. But he had a large family, and could not afford to quarrel with his bread-and-cheese. He was no worse than the majority of his fellows, for circumstances make humbugs of most of us, if not in one way, then in another.

He had heard all that common report had to tell him about Dinkel, and about the magical drug he had brought with him from the East, but he forebore to make any inquiries of his own into the matter. To him the whole thing was an insoluble mystery; but, for all that, there was one consolatory feature connected with it. So long as Mr. Cortelyon could be kept alive, even were it with

the connivance of the Foul Fiend himself, so long would he, James Banks, continue to draw a certain number of guineas for visits paid and physic supplied, although the one might be nothing more than a solemn farce, and the other might be poured down the kitchen sink.

To himself he stigmatized Cornelius Dinkel as a "Son of the Devil."

But what about the Hon. Mrs. Bullivant all this time?

After that last interview with the Squire, she had waited with exemplary patience for the news of his demise. He was a dear old man, and she had been grieved at finding him so near to death's door; but all these things are ordained by Providence for the best, and it would not only be useless but wicked to rebel against them. Of course, under the circumstances, she would have to go into mourning—that is to say, into a modified kind of mourning—for a short time. Society would expect it of her when the dead man's munificent bequest to her was made public. Well, she had the consolation of knowing that she never looked better than she did in mourning. Dear, dear Mr. Cortelyon!

Still, the expected news—one hardly likes to term it the longed-for news—failed to come. It was strange, it was very strange. After waiting a few more days with restrained impatience, she sent one of her servants direct to the Hall with a diplomatically worded message having reference to the state of Mr. Cortelyon's health. The answer he brought back was both surprising and disconcerting. An unexpected change had manifested itself; the Squire was very much better, and the improvement seemed likely to last.

"Oh, I am so glad, so very glad!" said Mrs. Bullivant to her messenger when he had unburdened himself of his news. "You have relieved me of a great anxiety."

"So the improvement seemed likely to last, did it?" she said to herself. But that was sheer nonsense. It had been her lot to see a good deal of sickness and death, and if she had ever seen a man whose hours were num-

bered, that man was Ambrose Cortelyon. The so-called improvement, as to the nature of which every one about him seemed to be laboring under a misapprehension, was but Nature's expiring effort. She had been a witness of such things before. For a few brief moments the lamp would flame up as brightly as ever it had done, and then would come sudden darkness.

It was with an easy mind that she set out next day for London, where some law business connected with her late father's affairs rendered her presence imperatively necessary. She was gone six weeks, during the whole of which time she looked, morning by morning, to receive a letter containing an announcement of the Squire's demise. But none came to hand. It was both unaccountable and disappointing. It would have been such an advantage to her to be able to buy her mourning in town! She journeyed back home in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. It was no longer "dear, noble-hearted Mr. Cortelyon," with her; he was now a "nasty tiresome old man, who ought to be ashamed of himself to be so long a-dying."

On this occasion Mrs. Bullivant had a travelling companion in the person of her half-brother, Captain Wilton Ferris, who was a son of the late Mrs. Flood by her first husband.

Captain Ferris, who had sold out of the army some years before in consequence of a certain scandal with which his name was prominently mixed up, was a handsome but blasé-looking man of forty. He was well-known in London society as a gambler and a rake who had been black-balled at more than one club. In his time he had gone through two fortunes, his own and his wife's—he was now a widower without family—and for the last few years had been reduced to living by such wits as nature had endowed him with; but at length he had come to the end of his tether. He had received a quiet hint that his presence on the heath at Newmarket was undesirable; men looked shyly on him at the card-table; his reputation with the dice-box seemed to have

preceded him wherever he went; pigeons worth the plucking were few and far between; and, worse than all, a bill for five hundred pounds, bearing his signature, would fall due in about ten weeks' time, his failure to take up which would involve nothing less than social ruin—such ruin as was still possible to him—and out-lawry.

His strait was a desperate one, and, as a last resource, he had come to his half-sister, in the hope that once more—neither for the first nor second time—he might find salvation at her hands.

Mrs. Bullivant was a woman of tepid affections; nature had made her so, and she could not help herself; but, in her limited and narrow way, she had always cherished a fondness for her handsome, scampish half-brother. Her own bringing-up had been of the most strait-laced kind, and maybe for that very reason she liked him none the worse on account of his faults, which—and so far one may give him credit—he never strove to hide from her; in point of fact, she was the only person in the world to whom he ever spoke frankly. As a consequence, she cherished no illusions in respect of him; she knew that at his time of life it was useless to look for any radical change or improvement in him; that which he had been and was now he would remain till the end.

He had told her all about the “damnable fix” in which he now found himself, and if she did not sympathize with him, that was probably because it was not in her nature to sympathize with any one. On the other hand, she did not blame him, as so many people in her place would have done, for the reckless folly which had at length landed him in such an *impasse*.

But if she did not sympathize with him in words, she did something else which was very much more to the purpose so far as he was concerned. She said to him, “As soon as ever Mr. Cortelyon’s legacy of three thousand pounds comes into my hands—and I am expecting the news of his death from hour to hour—I will place five hundred pounds of it at your disposal.”

That had been a fortnight ago, but the wished-for news was still lacking; so now Captain Ferris was journeying down to Uplands with his sister, glad enough to get away from London for awhile, where, so importunate were his creditors becoming, it was no longer safe for him to venture out of his lodgings by daylight. Besides, at Uplands he would be on the spot when the longed-for legacy, in which lay his only hope of salvation, should drop into his sister's lap.

At this time it so happened that Mrs. Bullivant was not in a position to supply her brother out of her own resources with anything approaching the sum needed to help him out of his difficulty. She had just completed the purchase of a considerable slice of freehold property abutting on her own estate, and for the present her balance at her banker's might be said to be down to zero.

Although the late Mr. Flood had never liked his stepson, and after his wife's death, which occurred within a few years of their marriage, had kept him at arm's-length as much as possible, he had yet felt compelled, for the sake of appearances, to invite him now and again on a short visit to Uplands, so that the Captain was no stranger to the place and its surroundings.

No sooner was breakfast over on the morning after the arrival of himself and his sister than he set out on foot for a long ramble. The way he took led him in the direction of Stanbrook, and when he reached the village of that name, which, as we know, lay within a bow-shot of the Hall, he marched into the bar parlor of the White Hart Inn and called for a bottle of the best sherry the house could furnish.

Such an order was attended to by the landlord in person, which was just what Ferris had counted on.

After they had chatted together for a few minutes about the weather and the crops, there was nothing out of the common in the Captain asking the worthy Boniface to join him over a glass of his own wine. A second glass helped to loose the latter's tongue, after which the rest was easy. They gossiped together for upwards of

an hour before Ferris went his way. There was no need for him to seek further information elsewhere; he had learnt all he wanted to know.

What he had heard impressed him greatly; nor was its effect less marked upon his sister, who was, however, inclined to be skeptical with regard to some of the details. One thing was evident to both: Mrs. Bullivant must go to Stanbrook on the morrow and ascertain for herself how matters were progressing.



## CHAPTER XV.

## "FATE POINTS THE WAY."

"WELL, how did you fare? How much longer is the old scoundrel going to keep Beelzebub out of his own?"

These questions were addressed by Captain Ferris to his sister, who had just got back from Stanbrook. He had been awaiting her return with ill-concealed impatience. It seemed to him that she had been gone an unconscionable time.

"My dear Wilton, I wish you wouldn't flurry one so. I will tell you all there is to tell if you will give me time. But first of all, mix me a little brandy-and-water."

Having taken off her outdoor things, inducted her feet into a pair of roomy house-shoes, and planted herself in her favorite easy-chair Mrs. Bullivant was ready to begin her narrative:

"In the first place, the rumors which have reached us from various quarters about Mr. Cortelyon's amazing recovery are not a bit exaggerated. I know for a fact that, at the time I saw him last, he had been given up by both his doctors, and was not expected to last the week out. If I ever saw a man with death in his face, it seemed to me he was that man. When I left him I bade him (mentally) a final farewell. So far so good. But what do I find to-day on reaching Stanbrook? The same man, truly, and yet another. Not the Ambrose Cortelyon whom I left at death's door, on whose face I saw already the shadow of the tomb, but Ambrose Cortelyon as I remember him a number of years ago. For him Time's dial has been put back a decade. Can you wonder if, for a few moments, I was struck dumb with astonishment?

"I found him, not in his bedroom, but in his library,

and how do you think he was engaged? Why, in drawing up, with the help of his secretary, a catalogue of the coins and medals which he has been accumulating for the last forty years? When he turned to greet me his voice was as firm and resonant as I ever remember it to have been. Then his secretary left the room and we were alone.

"He held out a lean, withered hand, and his face lighted up with one of his peculiar smiles. (When Mr. Cortelyon smiles you never can be sure whether he is smiling with you, at you, or merely at some hidden thought of his own.) 'Welcome, Onoria!' he began. 'I have been expecting a visit from you for some time past, but better late than not at all. You are surprised—he!—he! (now don't deny it, I can read your face like a book) at finding me perched here and busying myself with my favorite trivialities, when, if only I had behaved as ordinary mortals are wont to do, I should have been shouldered to my last abode weeks ago, and you would have been a considerably richer woman than you are to-day. Well, well, nobody can be more surprised than I. But why don't you sit down? I hate to have people standing about and staring at me.'

"What I said in reply, when he gave me a chance of speaking, is not worth repeating. As a matter of course, I explained how I had been called from home and did not get back till yesterday, but he listened without seeming to hear what I was talking about. Evidently he was busy with his own thoughts.

"His next words had reference to Gavin. He wanted to know whether the boy was quite well. When assured on the point he nodded his head and seemed pleased. Then he lay back in his chair for a little while without speaking, twiddling between his fingers, as if he loved it, a large gold coin which looked as if it might have been minted a couple of thousand years ago.

"At length he spoke: 'There is one matter, Onoria, about which I wish to give you my assurance. It is this: that whether I die to-morrow or not for five years to

come, my will, as it now stands, will remain unchanged. When once my mind is made up, it is made up for good; I never go back from my decision. Consequently, you may make yourself easy on that point. You know already that neither yourself nor your son has been forgotten in the will; indeed, I will go so far as to tell you this, that there is perhaps such a surprise in store for you as you little wot of. And now let us talk of something else. I hear the Browhead property is likely to come into the market in the course of a few weeks. I wish you would drive as far some day soon, look over it, and let me know what you think of it.'

"Nothing more passed that it would interest you to be told about, and before long I took my leave, but not till Mr. Cortelyon had requested me to visit him again on this day fortnight and take Gavin with me."

Captain Ferris's face was black as night. "Then it's quite evident the old fox has made up his mind not to die just yet," he said. "And yet it might be as well that he should not live too long. His promise about the will may be taken for what it's worth. Invalids—and I suppose Mr. Cortelyon may be counted one still—are notoriously changeable, and any day may see your hopes dashed to the ground."

Mrs. Bullivant looked at him, but his eyes did not meet hers. There was something behind his words, but she was not quite sure what it was. "Of course I fully admit, between you and me, that it would be a great relief if the Lord were to see fit to take the poor man to Himself," she said, after a pause. "But what can I do? In a case of this sort one is absolutely helpless." The Captain was trimming his nails, and did not reply.

After waiting a moment or two, his sister said: "By the way, I have something more to tell you. As I was driving back I overtook Ann Thorpe, who used to be under-cook at Uplands, but left my service three years ago to enter that of the Squire. I know her for a talkative, simple-minded young woman, and the sight of her supplied me with an idea which I at once proceeded to

put into practice. Stopping the carriage, I alighted, and bade Trotter drive on slowly and pick me up at the toll-bar. Then I joined Ann, and we walked on together. It was a lonely bit of road, and there was nobody to observe us. I was desirous of putting certain questions to her which no one but an inmate of the Hall could have answered to my satisfaction.

"With the questions themselves I need not trouble you. What I wanted from Ann was a confirmation or otherwise of the all but incredible news you picked up yesterday with reference to the man Dinkel and his doings at the Hall. What you had heard might be merely one of those idle rumors in which ignorant folk delight, but which they are never at the trouble to sift; or there might be a substratum of truth in it, but so overlaid with fiction that it would be next to impossible to separate the two. Strange to say, your statement was confirmed by Ann Thorpe in almost every particular.

"Mrs. Dinkel, the mother, has been acting as nurse to the Squire ever since Tatham, his body-servant, had to resign his duties on account of ill-health, and it was she who introduced her son at the Hall, but not till her patient had been given up by his doctors and was hardly expected to live from hour to hour.

"As you were told yesterday, this young Dinkel is said to have brought with him a marvellous drug from the Far East, which will almost bring dead people back to life. In any case, it seems certain that he has effected several remarkable cures in the village and neighborhood, and from the date of his first visit to the Hall the Squire began to mend. It appears that he goes there every evening after dark, taking with him a dose of his wonderful medicine, which he will allow no one to administer but himself.

"I have told you already how changed I found the Squire from what he was when I saw him last. It is a change which to me seems little less than miraculous, and yet, so far as can be gathered, it is wholly due to the man Dinkel. Dr. Banks, who has attended the Squire

for years, keeps on sending his physic as usual, but Ann Thorpe assures me that the bottles are never as much as uncorked. From what I saw myself to-day, and from what I gathered from Ann, it seems not unlikely that the Squire may last for a year or two, or even longer. But life is made up of crosses, and, however much one may try to convince oneself that everything is ordered for the best, it is sometimes a little difficult to do so."

Captain Ferris shut his penknife with a click. "And what would be the consequence, so far as Mr. Cortelyon is concerned, in case of anything happening to this fellow Dinkel?" he asked.

Mrs. Bullivant lifted her eyebrows. "Really, my dear Wilton, that is a question which I have no means of answering."

"For all that, it is one which might be worth considering."

He got up, stretched himself, crossed to the window, and stood staring out, whistling under his breath. His sister followed him with her eyes. She could read between the lines of his character far more clearly than any one else could.

"In such a case as you speak of, I should think it would be a very bad thing for Mr. Cortelyon," she said after a pause, in a low voice.

"My own opinion exactly," he made answer, without turning round.

The days followed each other till a week had gone by, and Captain Ferris was still at Uplands. Indeed, he knew of nowhere else to go to. London was too hot to hold him; the bailiffs were looking for him high and low. Here at any rate, he could lie by for awhile. But not for long. Hour by hour the day was creeping nearer when the fatal bill for five hundred pounds would fall due. After that not even Uplands would be safe for him. He must put the Channel between himself and the bloodhounds of the law.





"The body of the 'Man-witch' had been found shot through the heart."

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Little further allusion was made either by his sister or himself to the subject which loomed so largely in the thoughts of both. What more, indeed, was there to be said? Talk for talking's sake was what neither of them was given to indulge in. For them, just then, life seemed to be at a standstill. They were waiting breathlessly, so to speak, for the tidings which still delayed their coming. Captain Ferris was out and about a great deal, putting a discreet question here, and eliciting a morsel of information there, but all he heard pointed to an unchanged state of affairs at the Hall. Any fine afternoon Mr. Cortelyon might be seen driving about the country roads in the shabby old chariot which dated from his grandfather's era, and had in those days ranked as one of the grandest coaches in town.

"He'll live to be a hundert, you see if he doan't, sir," said one man to whom the Captain had put a certain question.

Ferris turned away with a stifled oath.

It was on the afternoon of the tenth day after Mrs. Bullivant's return from London that some startling news reached Uplands. It was brought by the Tuxford carrier, who retailed it as a *bonne bouche* to the maids in the kitchen, whence, before long, it penetrated to the drawing-room. The body of the "man-witch," Cornelius Dinkel, had been found early that morning, shot through the heart, in Threeways Spinny. So far nobody had been arrested for the crime.

Mrs. Bullivant was alone in the drawing-room when her maid brought her the news. Gavin had lately had a pony given him, and his uncle had taken him out for a ride on it. A sudden vertigo took the mistress of Uplands almost before her maid had got half-way through her story. She motioned for her salts, and for a few moments lay back in her chair with closed eyes and white face. Then presently, with a faint, "I'm better; you can go," she dismissed the girl.

It was not the news itself, startling though it was, which had had such an effect on Mrs. Bullivant. It was a hor-



rible suspicion which, so to speak, had gripped her by the throat and refused to loosen its hold of her.

Yesterday evening, as daylight was dying into dusk, her brother had left the house without saying either where he was going or when he might be looked for back. But she was used to his queer moods and apparently purposeless comings and goings, and found it best to question him as little as possible. She had hardly thought to see anything more of him till breakfast time next morning. Great, therefore, was her astonishment when, on crossing the hall a little after eleven o'clock on her way to her bedroom, she suddenly met him face to face. He had entered the house by a side door which could be opened from the outside without disturbing any of the servants. That he was both surprised and disconcerted by the meeting he showed plainly, his intention having apparently been to reach his room unseen by any one.

But it was not so much the fact of coming unexpectedly on her brother as the appearance he presented that caused Mrs. Bullivant to start back with a low cry of alarm. For his face was as colorless as that of a corpse; his features were drawn and haggard; he looked at her with eyes which she did not recognize as his, so strangely changed was their expression; he was bareheaded, and his black hair, matted with sweat, was all in disorder; while his chest rose and fell pantingly like that of one who had outspent himself with running. Finally, both his boots and his clothes were bespattered with mud, for much rain had fallen in the course of the day.

"Great heavens! Wilton, what ails you? What has happened to you?" cried Mrs. Bullivant.

"For God's sake not so loud! Such an adventure!" he panted. "Set upon by two ruffians in a lonely part of the road. One of 'em I managed to knock over with a left-hander—then took to my heels. If I hadn't they'd have bludgeoned my brains out. Two to one, you know."

"What a narrow escape for you! But what has become of your hat?"

"I've not lost it, have I?" he gasped, while a great

terror leapt into his eyes. "If so, I'm lost too!" A moment later his expression changed. "What a fool I am!" he exclaimed with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "I've got it all the while. It fell off while I was running and as the rascals were not far behind me I made a dash at it and crammed it into one of my pockets. It will look a pretty object to-morrow, *sans doute*. But now to bed, for I'm dog-tired."

"Shall I send you up some hot water and——"

"Curse it all, no! I want no eye but yours to see me to-night." He glared at her for a moment as if he was about to strike her. Then with a shrug and a sudden dropping of his hands, he said. "Forgive me, Onny, I'm not myself to-night." And with that he passed her and went swiftly upstairs, and presently she heard the key turned in the lock of his room.

It was the recollection of this scene which shook her with such a terrible fear this afternoon. What had her brother meant by saying that if his hat were lost he was lost too? Supposing he had lost it and it had afterwards been found, what then? And why had he been so anxious that no eyes save hers should see him on his return? Was there any truth in the story of his encounter with the two men? But, above all, had he had any hand in last night's tragedy? That he was utterly unscrupulous she had long known, and she divined, without knowing, that in his nature there were dark unsounded depths in which the most ghastly secret might be hidden up forever. She was only too well aware by what desperate reasons her brother was urged to wish Dinkel out of the way. To him it might, and most likely would, mean all the difference between salvation and ruin.

She waited his coming with a quaking heart. She was sitting in a mixed light, that of the dying afternoon and that thrown out by the glowing embers on the hearth, when he entered the room. Having shut the door, he stood there with the handle in his hand, without advancing. "Well, have you heard the news?" he asked abruptly in a high, harsh voice, very different from his usual

smooth cultivated tones. "Dinkel's dead—shot through the heart last night, presumably when on his way back from Stanbrook. Body found early this morning by some hedgers on their way to work. What will happen now, I wonder? There's the rub, both for you and me."

"I had already heard. The Tuxford carrier brought the news about an hour ago."

"Had I known that I needn't have hurried back, as I did, on purpose to tell you. But no matter."

"Have any traces of the—the perpetrator of the crime been discovered, or have they any idea where to look for him?"

"'Pon my soul, I don't know. I never asked. 'Twas a point that had no interest for me. But now I'll go upstairs and make myself presentable, and join you presently over a cup of tea. We have had a famous scamper, the boy and I. But he will be with you in a minute or two."

After tea they played *ecarté* for a couple of hours, and never had Mrs. Bullivant seen her brother more cheerful and at his ease. She went to bed not knowing what to think.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE SHEARS OF ATROPOS.

THE news of the tragedy in Threeways Spinny reached Stanbrook about nine o'clock in the morning. The body of the murdered man had already been taken home, and it was Mrs. Dinkel's next-door neighbor who was deputed to convey the sad tidings to her.

She was on the point of taking the Squire's breakfast upstairs when the man arrived at the Hall, and asked to see her.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Dinkel entered her patient's room. Like the thoughtful creature she was, even in the midst of her distress she had not forgotten the breakfast tray. Having placed it on the table by the bedside, she turned to the Squire, and, in a voice which not all her efforts could render firm, said:

"Sir, a great misfortune has befallen me—the most terrible that could have happened. My son has been murdered! The tidings have just reached me. His body was found early this morning in Threeways Spinny. He had been shot through the heart—he who had not an enemy in the world! Sir, I must leave here at once. I am wanted at home, as you can well conceive; but if——"

"Dead! your son dead!" shrieked the Squire, almost as shrilly as a woman might have done. Then for a few seconds he remained speechless. His heart stopped beating, and a black veil dropped before his eyes. But the very force of the shock brought its own reaction. He flung up his arms, and then let them drop helplessly on the bed. "In that case, what is to become of me?" he moaned.

"The Lord in heaven only knows, sir, for I'm sure I don't," answered Mrs. Dinkel. It was all she could do to crush down her emotion.

The Squire sank back on his pillow with a groan. The bereaved mother stood looking at him, anxious to go, and yet, so strong was the professional instinct in her, not liking to leave him.

Of a sudden he beckoned her to go closer to him, and when she had done so he clutched her by the sleeve of her gown. In three short minutes his face seemed to have aged a dozen years. His lips had turned of a grayish purple, and a thin froth had gathered at their corners. His eyes were the eyes of a terror-hunted soul brought to bay, and yet ready to turn and curse with its latest breath the inexorable fate which had driven it there.

"Don't think I do not pity you, because that would be a mistake on your part," he said. "I pity you and sympathize with you most sincerely. But—but your son must have left a lot of the drug—you know what I mean—behind him. Don't you think so, hey? And—and as soon as ever you can spare time—in the course of the day, you know—you will have a thorough search made, and ascertain the quantity, and let me know at the earliest possible moment, won't you? Yes, yes; he must have left quite a considerable quantity ready prepared. I feel sure of it; so don't forget to send me word as soon as you can."

There was a terrible eagerness in the way he spoke, and he would not loose his hold of her till she had promised him, that he should hear from her in the course of the forenoon.

When she was gone her place was taken by Miss Baynard.

That morning the Squire's breakfast was sent away untasted, and he made no effort to get up. Anxiety held him as with a vise—an anxiety shot through and through with forebodings the most dire. He lay without speaking, watching with feverish eyes the slow-moving fingers of the clock on the chimney-piece, each of whose solemn ticks seemed to him to mark a stitch in the tapestry of Doom. It was a few minutes past two when a servant brought upstairs a small sealed packet, together with a letter, both of them addressed to "Ambrose Cortelyon,

Esq.," and both of them just brought by a special messenger. The sick man had no need to ask who was the sender.

"Open the letter and read it aloud, Nell," he said, as soon as the servant had left the room. It was not merely that he had lost the control of his fingers—he shook from head to foot like one in an ague fit.

Nell did as she was bidden.

"Honored Sir" (she read), "In accordance with your wish and my own promise, I have made diligent and careful search in every corner, cupboard, and drawer of the room in which my poor son mixed his physics and attended to his doctoring business, with the result (and it grieves me much to have to tell it you) that I have not succeeded in finding more than two phials of the stuff ready mixed for taking, the which, under cover, I herewith send you.

"It would appear to have been my son's custom not to prepare any large quantity of the drug beforehand, perhaps—but on this point I speak without certainty—because he found that some portion of its virtue was lost with keeping.

"I remain, honored sir,

"Your obedient, humble servant,

MARTHA DINKEL.

"P.S.—Since writing the above I have made another thorough search, high and low, in every nook and corner of the premises, but it has proved a sheer waste of time.

"Mr. Cortelyon, sir, in the midst of my own distress, permit me respectfully to observe that my heart bleeds for you."

When Nell had read to the last word, the Squire made no comment aloud, only to himself he murmured: "*Mors ultima linea rerum est.*" He had not opened his Horace for years, but the line came back to him quite freshly to-day. He knew that he was a doomed man, and that no earthly power could save him. Well, accord-

ing to all human calculations he ought to have been dead and buried a number of weeks ago, but another brief spell of life had been granted him, and if, through a tragic misfortune which no one could have foreseen, it had come prematurely to a close, why, there was no help for it. All that was now left him to do was to wrap his toga about him and await the end with silent stoicism.

Although he took the two remaining doses of the drug in due course, he made no attempt to rise from his bed after hearing of Dinkel's death. From that hour life, with its manifold interests, became to him as a dead letter. He had done with it, and it had done with him. They were quits.

So, day after day and night after night, he lay in the big four poster, silent for the most part, and often without opening his eyes for hours together; feeling his strength ebbing imperceptibly away, and, between his fitful snatches of sleep, thinking, ever thinking, for his mind remained as vigorous and lucid as ever it had been. What strange and awesome thoughts must oftentimes have been his as he lay there in grim resolute silence, waiting for his "order of release"!

His niece and Andry Luce took it in turns to watch by him. It was an easy task, there was so little that he wanted or that could be done for him. Miss Baynard had taken it on herself to send for Drs. Banks and Mills, who responded to the summons in all haste.

The Squire opened his eyes and favored them with one of his sardonic smiles as they entered the room.

"Eh-eh! come to see the last of your handiwork?" he said, and already his voice had sunk to a half-whisper. "Very kind and attentive of you, I'm sure. And besides, my case is such an interesting and uncommon one. It will be something for you to wrangle over as long as you live, and at the end you will know no more about it than you do now. Yes, yes, very kind and attentive of you; but as for your physic, I'll have no more on't—that's flat. Throw it to the dogs, as Shakespeare says. And now, 'I have an exposition of sleep come upon me.'"

Of course they could do nothing, and to Miss Baynard they were candid enough to admit as much. It was a sad state of things.

And so the muffled hours stole after each other one by one till a week had gone by, by which time it became evident that the end was not far off.

No arrest had yet been made in connection with the murder of Cornelius Dinkel, and it may here be added that none ever was made. The murderer had left no traces behind him, and, search as diligently as they might, not a tittle of evidence was forthcoming to back up any of the theories propounded by the authorities in relation to the crime.

On a certain afternoon, somewhat to Miss Baynard's surprise, Mrs. Bullivant made her appearance at the Hall. It was a step which she had not taken till after mature consideration. The first few days after Dinkel's death had been passed by her in a fever of apprehension. Precisely what it was that she feared she did not whisper even to herself, but she could not bear a ring or a knock at the door without experiencing a spasm of silent terror. Yet all this time her brother remained as darkly quiet, as listless, and apparently as indifferent to everything, save his own little comforts, as she ever remembered him to have been. Wet or fine, he went out every day for a long walk, and it was he who brought back the rumors he lighted on in his rambles anent the Squire of Stanbrook.

One day he brought back something which was more than a rumor. It was something he had been told at second-hand as having emanated from no less an authority than Dr. Banks. Mr. Cortelyon was at death's door, and this time there was no possible chance of his recovery! Then it was that Mrs. Bullivant debated with her brother whether she ought not to pay one more visit to Stanbrook while the Squire was able to recognize her. Captain Ferris was strongly of opinion that she ought on no account to omit doing so. There was no knowing what influences might be at work. What more easy than to persuade a dying man to execute a codicil to his will, or



even to have a fresh will drawn up, cancelling wholly or in part the provisions of the one already in existence? Most certainly she ought to see for herself how the land lay, not merely in her own interest, but in that of her son, and, if necessary, remain on the spot till all was over.

Little persuasion was needed to induce Mrs. Bullivant to fall in with her brother's views. By this time her vague, unspoken apprehensions had in a great measure subsided. Dinkel had been dead more than a week, and nothing had happened. Nothing would happen now, she told herself. She would go to Stanbrook.

More than once—indeed quite a number of times—when talking over her last interview with Mr. Cortelyon, her brother had made her repeat one sentence in particular which the Squire had addressed to her in allusion to the contents of his will: "There is perhaps such a surprise in store for you as you little wot of." To both her and the Captain it was a sentence which seemed pregnant with golden possibilities; and it is hardly to be wondered at that, on her way to Stanbrook, her imagination built up more than one gorgeous aerial fabric, although, as a rule, she kept that arrant jerry-builder in the most complete subjection.

On hearing that Mrs. Bullivant had arrived, Miss Baynard went downstairs to receive her. When they met the former made as if she would have kissed Nell, but the girl drew back a little haughtily. She was not in the habit of being kissed, even by those of her own sex, and in her visitor's case it would have seemed to her a veritable *baiser de Judas*. But she could not, with any show of courtesy, refuse her hand.

"How is he, dear Miss Baynard?" were Mrs. Bullivant's first words. She spoke in hushed tones, although as yet she had got no farther than the entrance-hall.

"He is sinking fast, and is almost speechless."

"You shock me more than I can say." And, to do her justice, for the moment she looked shocked. To herself she said, "If he is speechless, or nearly so, it is too late for him to think of altering his will, and, if he has done

so already, I have come too late to help it." Aloud she went on: "I had not the faintest idea that his illness had assumed the gravity you tell me it has—news percolates to us so slowly at Uplands—otherwise I should have been here before now. But now that I am here, dear Miss Baynard, you must let me stay with you till the end. Mr. Cortelyon, as you are probably aware, regarded me with a very special affection. Had circumstances turned out differently, I should have been his daughter-in-law. But my life has been one long disappointment."

Knowing what she did of the purport of her uncle's will, Nell felt that, little as she liked the woman, she was not in a position to object to her presence in the house. In a very little while Mrs. Bullivant would be mistress of Stanbrook and of everything in it, while she, Nell, would be little better than an outcast. But however bitter and humiliating it might be to know this, she had other things to think of just now.

When Mrs. Bullivant and Nell entered the sick room together some minutes later, Mrs. Budd, who had been keeping watch in the interim, rose, curtsied to the newcomer, and went.

Mr. Cortelyon lay with closed eyes and with both arms extended on the coverlet; one shut hand held the coveted stater of Epatiecus, the other grasped his silver snuff-box. An involuntary exclamation escaped Mrs. Bullivant as her eyes fell on his face. Once before she had believed him to be at the point of death, and only by what might almost be termed a miracle had his life been prolonged. This time no miracle would intervene. His hours, nay, his very minutes, were numbered; Death's awful shadow was already closing round him; would he live through the night?

About half an hour later he opened his eyes, turned his head slightly and stared about him. Mrs. Bullivant rose, crossed on tiptoe to the bed and bent over him. "Dear Mr. Cortelyon, don't you know me?" she murmured. "Yes, I am sure you do."

For a second or two he peered up into her face with

contracted lids, as if not quite sure about her identity. Then, with an inarticulate noise, which seemed more indicative of anger and repulsion than of anything else, he raised both his hands and pushed her rather roughly away. Mrs. Bullivant went back to her chair with a somewhat heightened color in her cheeks. "Poor dear!" she said in an undertone; "it is quite evident that he no longer knows what he is about."

And so daylight slid slowly into dark, and the two women still kept watch on either side of the bed. Dr. Banks, with a cheerful fire and a magnum of port to keep him company, sat below in the library—merely for form's sake, and because it would be an injustice to his wife, and family not to make his bill as long a one as possible while the chance was his of doing so.

For some hours the dying man's skin had been gradually changing color, till now it had become of one uniform leaden blue tint. Dr. Banks, who stepped upstairs for a couple of minutes every half-hour or so, said to himself that it must be one of the effects of "that damned drug."

Midnight was drawing on. For upwards of an hour Mr. Cortelyon had been lying to all appearance in a comatose state, when of a sudden he opened his eyes and raised himself in bed without help—a thing he had not done for days past. "The will! the will!—get it and destroy it before it's too late!" he cried in harsh, insistent tones, punctuated by gasps. "I've done wrong—wrong. I know it now—I feel it. To my grandson all—all! To that woman"—pointing to the shocked Mrs. Bullivant—"nothing. Send at once—not a minute's delay. Piljoy has it. Or else it will be too late—too late!"

Alas! it was already too late. He sank back, gasping for breath, with eyes that were already beginning to glaze. Five minutes later all was over.

Mrs. Bullivant dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief. "Poor dear! I am so thankful he did not suffer much," she said. "That he should wander a little in his mind at the last is not to be wondered at. Nearly all aged people do that when they are dying."

## CHAPTER XVII.

## AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY.

It was five days later.

The funeral was over. Everything had been done decently and in order, and in the great drawing-room at Stanbrook, the shutters of which of late years had been rarely opened, a small company were assembled, by invitation of Mr. Piljoy, to hear the reading of the dead man's will.

Miss Baynard and Mrs. Budd sat together on one of the couches; a little way removed, in stately isolation, sat Mrs. Bullivant; while Mrs. Dace, the housekeeper, remained modestly in the background, with Andry Luce and two or three other old servants to keep her company.

The gentlemen comprised Mr. Herries, the vicar; Mr. Delafosse, Sir James Dalrymple, of Langrig, and Squire Staniforth, of Claypool; the two latter of whom, at Mr. Cortelyon's request, had agreed to act as trustees under his will. They were clear-headed, thoroughly practical men, with plenty of leisure on their hands, and, as such, had recommended themselves to the late Squire, who was their senior by more than a score years, and had known their fathers before them.

Mr. Piljoy sat by himself at the big oval table in the centre of the room. The will, as yet unopened, lay there in front of him.

When everybody had settled into their places and the door was finally shut, Mr. Piljoy cleared his voice, and, leaning forward a little with his clasped hands resting on the table, said, addressing the company at large: "Before breaking the seal of the document which I am here for the purpose of reading to you, I may just remark for

the information of everybody, and in order to satisfy any curiosity which might otherwise be felt on the point, that this is not the first testament drawn up by me for the late Mr. Cortelyon. There was a much earlier will, the provisions of which, I need scarcely tell you, were of a widely different nature from those of the present one; but that will was destroyed at the time of the unhappy quarrel between father and son, of which, I daresay, most of those here have some cognizance. For the next few years no will of any kind was in existence, nor could Mr. Cortelyon be persuaded into making another till he found himself overtaken by illness of a very serious kind. I will now, with your permission, proceed to open and read the will."

Sir James tapped his snuff-box, opened it, offered it to his co-trustee, and then indulged himself with a large pinch. The servants in the background laid their heads together and whispered among themselves. Mrs. Bullivant tried to look as if the reading was a matter which in no way concerned her, and almost succeeded. Miss Baynard and Andry Luce alone knew what was coming. To the former the whole proceeding was fraught with heart-felt torture, from which she would fain have escaped had there been any way open for her to do so.

The will itself was enclosed in a sheet of parchment secured with two large black seals. These latter Mr. Piljoy did not break, but cut round them with his penknife and got at the contents that way. Pushing the envelope aside, he proceeded to unfold and straighten out the will; then, having settled his spectacles more firmly astride his nose, he gave a preliminary cough and turned over the first page.

Apparently, however, he had forgotten to how many pages the document extended, and in order to satisfy himself on the point, before beginning to read he turned the leaves over one by one—there were only five or six in all—till he came to the last one, on reaching which his eye instinctively travelled to the foot of it.

Next instant he gave a start and sprang to his feet, his

eyes still glued to the bottom of the will. He looked dazed—thunderstruck—and well he might.

“What is the meaning of this?” he cried. “What devilry has been at work? The will is unsigned!”

And so, indeed, it proved to be. There was the space for the three signatures, those of the testator and the two witnesses, but the signatures themselves were wanting.

Over the scene that ensued we need not linger. The servants were told that they were no longer wanted, and went back to their duties terribly crestfallen. The legacies on which they had so surely counted seemed to have dissolved on a sudden into thin air.

For the first few minutes after the fatal announcement Mrs. Bullivant sat like an image of stony despair. So stunned was she that, for the time being, she seemed deprived of the power of coherent thought. She was roused, in part at least, by some words addressed by Sir James Dalrymple to Mr. Piljoy.

“Of course the will as it stands is wholly inoperative, still, Mr. Staniforth and I are a little curious with regard to its contents, so perhaps you won’t mind devoting a minute or two to our enlightenment. There is no need for you to read out the different clauses; all we want is to be made acquainted with the main features of the document.”

“Five minutes will suffice for that purpose,” replied the lawyer. “To begin with, there are some half-dozen bequests, varying in amount, to as many old servants and dependents, with the details of which I need not trouble you. To the testator’s old friend, Mr. Delafosse”—bowing to that gentleman—“are bequeathed sundry coins, medals, and other curios, a list of which will be found among the private papers of the deceased. Then I must not omit to mention that to each of you gentlemen, for your trouble in acting as trustees, is left the sum of one hundred and fifty guineas; and to Mr. Herries a similar sum for distribution among the deserving poor of the parish. With regard to his niece, Miss Baynard”—here he favored Nell with a bow—“the testator’s instructions are

that a sum of money be invested in her name in the public funds sufficient to bring her in an annual income of three hundred pounds, the which she shall enjoy for life, the principal at her demise to be divided among certain specified charitable institutions. To the Hon. Mrs. Bullivant—a bow for that lady—is left the sum of three thousand pounds in hard cash. Everything else of which the testator may die possessed—including the Stanbrook and Barrowmead properties, another large estate on the borders of Yorkshire, and certain other smaller estates—is willed in trust to Gavin Bullivant, the son of the Hon. Mrs. Bullivant, on condition that on coming of age he adds to his present cognomen that of ‘Cortelyon.’ Finally, I may mention that as regards the Stanbrook property Mrs. Bullivant is bequeathed a life-interest in the same.”

He ceased, and Sir James and his friend stared at each other in sheer amazement, but in Mrs. Bullivant’s presence they could not well give expression to what they thought. Mr. Staniforth was the first to break the silence.

“Both Sir James and I were under the impression that the late Mr. Cortelyon had a grandson. His only son died some few years ago, did he not, leaving behind him a widow and one child?”

“He did.”

“And yet in your summary of the contents of the will you made no mention of either of their names.”

“The widow died some time ago. There was no mention of the boy’s name on my part for the very good reason that it is not included in the will. Mr. Cortelyon never forgave his son’s marriage, and refused in any way to acknowledge his grandchild.”

Again the two men looked at each other, and again they refrained from giving expression to the thoughts at work within them.

Then said Sir James: “An unsigned will is so much waste paper. In case no other will, duly executed, should turn up, what will happen?”

“Only one thing can happen. The case will resolve

itself into one of intestacy, and everything—lock, stock, and barrel—will go to the heir-at-law, that is to say, to the grandson of whom mention has just been made.”

The two gentlemen nodded. That was their own view exactly.

Miss Baynard had sat all this time without speaking or stirring. When Mr. Piljoy made the startling announcement that the will was without signature, she flashed a look at Andry Lucc which seemed to ask in bewilderment, “What is the meaning of this?” But Andry, nursing his chin in the palm of one hand, was apparently staring straight before him, and did not, or would not, meet her eyes. When, however, Mrs. Dace and the others proceeded to leave the room, Andry, who was about to follow them, glanced at Nell, and, in obedience to a signal from her, resumed his seat.

Nell as was dumfounded as Mrs. Bullivant by the turn events had taken. She had not clearly comprehended what the result would be of the will being unsigned till she heard Mr. Piljoy’s declaration that, in the event of no other will being found, everything would go to Evan as his grandfather’s heir-at-law. Then a great gladness took possession of her, and her heart swelled with thankfulness.

But of a sudden, a shiver of apprehension ran through her. Mr. Staniforth was speaking:

“Have you any reason whatever, Mr. Piljoy, for supposing that any other will than this unsigned one is in existence?”

Not Miss Baynard only, but Mrs. Bullivant as well, awaited the lawyer’s answer with strained breathlessness.

Mr. Piljoy shrugged his shoulders. “That, sir, is a question which just now I am hardly prepared to answer, and for this reason, that no one can be more mystified and puzzled by the turn affairs have taken this afternoon than I am. One supposition, and one only, suggests itself to me as tending in the slightest degree to elucidate the mystery. What that supposition is I will, with your permission, now proceed to explain.”



He lay back in the big library chair, cleared his voice, and toyed with his spectacles for a few seconds before proceeding.

"In accordance with Mr. Cortelyon's instructions, his will was drawn up by me in duplicate. This was done as a provision of safety; in the event of any hitch or blunder occurring in the signing or witnessing of one document, the other would be available. Gout having laid me by the heels, I gave the duplicate wills into the charge of Mr. Tew, my managing clerk, who was just as competent to see to the signing and witnessing as I was. Here before me is the will which he next day brought back and handed to me for safe custody in the belief that it had been duly signed and witnessed; and here is the envelope that held it, sealed in two places with Mr. Cortelyon's own seal, and with the words, 'Ambrose Cortelyon—His Will' written across the face of it with his own pen. Now, on consideration, it seems to me just possible that, through some mischance, the unsigned will got substituted for the signed one in the envelope. If my supposition has any basis of fact, the question that naturally follows is, What became of the duplicate will? Is there any one present, who is in a position to throw any light on the point involved?"

Whether consciously or unconsciously, as he asked the question his eyes fixed themselves on Miss Baynard. The eyes of every one there followed those of Mr. Piljoy.

Nell stood up, her cheeks warmed with the fine glow of color. "My uncle's secretary, Andry Luce, who is now present, was, I believe, in the room when the will was signed."

"Then he will doubtless be willing to answer to the best of his ability any questions we may think well to put to him?"

Turning to Andry, Nell said, "You are quite willing to answer any questions Mr. Piljoy or these other gentlemen may ask you, are you not?"

The reply was two vigorous nods in the affirmative.

Turning to Sir James and his friend, Nell said, "Unfort-

unately, Andry is dumb, and has been so from his youth, so that I shall have to translate his answers for you."

"Come a bit more to the front, Andry, there's a good fellow," said Mr. Piljoy, who knew him of old. Then he seemed to consider for a few seconds while Andry changed his seat.

"You were in the room when the will was signed?" was the lawyer's first question.

With a look at Nell, his quick-moving fingers spelled out the answer, "I was," which was repeated aloud by her; and the same process had to be gone through in the case of all his answers.

"What persons were in the room at the time besides yourself and the testator?"

"Mr. Tew, and the two witnesses—Peter Grice, the groom, and Mike Denny, the under-gardener."

"Were you aware that Mr. Tew had brought two wills with him?"

"I was, I saw both of them."

"On entering the room what did he do with them?"

"He gave them both to the Squire."

"And what happened next?"

"The Squire thrust one of them under his pillow, and gave the other back to Mr. Tew for him to read it aloud."

"And what happened when the reading had come to an end?"

"The bell rang for me—I had been ordered out of the room while the reading took place—and, on entering, Mr. Tew told me that the Squire was ready for the witnesses, whom I had been careful to have close at hand, so that there should be no delay."

"Proceed."

"The witnesses were brought into the room and placed where they could see all that went forward. Pen and ink were in readiness. I raised the Squire in bed—he was too weak to sit up without help—and supported him with an arm round his waist. Mr. Tew placed the will in front of him, gave him the pen, pointed out the place

for him, and with that Mr. Cortelyon slowly and carefully signed his name. Then Mr. Tew took the will to the table and caused Grice and Denny to sign it one after the other. When that was done the two men were dismissed."

"Yes, and after that?"

"Following the men into the corridor, by the Squire's orders I made each of them a present of a crown piece. That done, I at once went back to the room. Mr. Tew was standing by the table with the folded will in his hand. 'Seal it up,' said my master to me. Mr. Tew having handed to it to me, I at once proceeded to enclose it in the sheet of parchment, out of which it was taken by Mr. Piljoy a little while since, sealing the packet in two places with my master's own seal. Then I held him up again, and with a trembling hand he wrote on the envelope, 'Ambrose Cortelyon—His Will.' That done, the packet was given into the custody of Mr. Tew, and the business was at an end."

"Not quite, Andry, not quite—at least as far as we are concerned. You are forgetting the duplicate will. What became of that?"

"Mr. Tew had not been five minutes gone before my master drew the other will from under his pillow, and, giving it to me, said, 'Burn it now—at once.' There was a fire in the room, and, taking the will, I thrust it between the bars. Mr. Cortelyon never took his eyes off the grate till it was burnt to ashes."

"You have no reason whatever for supposing that the unsigned will was substituted for the signed one during the time you were out of the room?"

"No, sir—how should I? Mr. Tew never left the room, and when I went back it was from his hands I received the will in order to seal it up."

Apparently Mr. Piljoy had no more questions to put. After a glance round at the perplexed faces of his audience, he said: "Notwithstanding the very clear and straightforward statement with which Andry Luce has just favored us, the mystery of the unsigned will remains

exactly where it was before. We seem no nearer a solution of it than we were at first, and I confess myself wholly at a loss to advise as to what step, if any, it behoves us to take next. Never in the whole of my experience have I been confronted with a state of affairs so puzzling and inexplicable."

"Never heard tell of owt like it, dang me if I have!" exclaimed Sir James, who had a habit of lapsing into the vernacular now and again.

"Licks cock-fighting all to bits, that it does," muttered Mr. Staniforth.

The Vicar and Mr. Delafosse spoke together in low tones.

So far Mrs. Bullivant had maintained an unbroken silence. Though more than once greatly tempted to do so, she had put a strong restraint upon herself, and had sat there with compressed lips listening to all that was said, passing through the whole gamut of feeling from hope to despair, and finally struck to the earth, almost, as it seemed, beyond recovery, by Mr. Piljoy's last words. There had been revealed to her a golden vision far exceeding her utmost dreams, but between her and it some malignant fiend had dug a shadowy gulf which he defied her to overpass. She had been vouchsafed a glimpse of Paradise, only to have the gates of pearl slammed in her face. It was maddening. Her very soul was aflame with impotent rage. She was tortured almost beyond endurance by the knowledge of all she had lost; of all that had slipped through her fingers, as at the bidding of a necromancer, before she had a chance of grasping it; of all that ought to have been hers, but was not!

She could no longer keep silent. "It is very evident to me," she began, addressing herself directly to the lawyer, "that my helpless boy and I have been made the victims of a vile conspiracy. Whether you, sir, are in the secret of it or no I cannot say, but I give you warning that I shall lose no time in placing the affair in the hands of my solicitors, and that even if it cost me every shilling I have in the world, this foul attempt to defraud

me and mine shall be unmasked, and the concocters of it brought to the bar of justice."

She spoke with studied quietude and without any trace of passion, but her hearers felt that in those smooth accents there was a hidden venom far more dangerous than any mere outburst of feminine anger would have been.

"A vile conspiracy!" burst forth the irate lawyer. "I would have you know, madame, that——"

She stopped him with an imperious gesture. "I have said all I wish to say, and no empty protestations on your part will avail anything. Roguery has been at work and must be unmasked. It is enough that you know my intentions."

She had risen while speaking, and now, after the slightest possible bow to Sir James and the others, she moved with her proudest and most dignified air towards the door, which Andry hastened to open for her, and so went her way, to the great relief of everybody there.

"Well, that caps everything!" ejaculated Mr. Staniforth. "A sweet temper to live with, eh, Jimmy?"

"Ay, but think of all the woman has lost, and by a turn of fortune's wheel the like of which I never heard tell of. No wonder she's put about; in her place who wouldn't be? Not but what, mind you, I consider the will a most unjust one, and I can't say I'm anything but glad that things have turned out as they have."

Mr. Delafosse had sat through the proceedings as mum as a mouse. He had all a collector's selfishness, and although he told himself how glad he was that, despite his late friend's unjust will, the rightful heir would succeed to the property, he could not help being very sorrowful on his own account. Under the changed circumstances of the case not a coin, not a medal, not a curio of any kind would come to him; and there were so many things in his friend's collection which his soul coveted! It was very, very sad, but there was no help for it.

When the others were gone Mr. Piljoy and Nell had a little confidential talk together,

"Never in the whole of my professional experience have I been so perplexed and mystified as by the events of this afternoon," said the lawyer. "I can't make head or tail of 'em, and that's a fact. Of course, when I get back I shall question Tew very closely about all that took place at the signing of the will, but I must say that I have very little hope of his being able to throw any fresh light on the affair. It's just as if we had all been made the victims of a conjurer's trick. Not but what, Miss Nell, I'm more than pleased at the way things have turned out, and I don't mind confessing to you that I was strongly opposed to the will as it stands, and went as far as I dared in the endeavor to persuade your uncle not to disinherit his grandson *in toto*. But you know the kind of man he was, how obstinate, and how utterly opposed to any suggestions from others which ran counter to his own views; indeed, he would hardly listen to me, and ended by telling me with an oath to mind my own business. On one point only do I feel sorry. If no other will turns up, of which I fail to see any likelihood, you, my dear Miss Nell, will be left out in the cold, for in that case, as I have remarked already, the son of Richard Cortelyon becomes the sole heir and legatee."

"And do you think for one moment, Mr. Piljoy, that I am anything but rejoiced that such should be the case?" demanded Nell, with sparkling eyes. "If you do, you misjudge me strangely. Oh! it was a most unjust and unnatural will, and my uncle himself acknowledged it to be so, but not till too late. With his last breath he implored me to send for the will and destroy it. His last conscious words were, 'To my grandson—all; to that woman'—meaning Mrs. Bullivant, who was there by the bedside—'nothing.' Had he but lived a few hours longer, the will would have been destroyed in accordance with his wishes."

"I am very glad you have told me this, Miss Nell, very glad indeed. If one were superstitiously inclined, one would not find it hard to believe that it was the Squire's own hand which, by some means unknown to us, erased

his signature from a document the existence of which, in the clear light which sometimes comes to people at the point of death, he saw reason to regret."

"Should I live to be a hundred, I shall look back to this day as one of the red-letter days of my existence," said Nell with fervor. "No words could express to you how glad I am. But tell me, Mr. Piljoy, what is the next thing to be done?"

"My advice is that just at present we do nothing. Should it really prove to be Mrs. Bullivant's intention to contest the heir's claim—for one never can foretell what a desperate woman may or may not choose to do—I shall doubtless hear from her solicitors before long. Meanwhile, our best plan will be to rest quietly on our oars."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE MISSING HEIR.

Not till a fortnight had gone by did Nell hear from Mr. Piljoy. Then he wrote as follows:—

“DEAR MISS BAYNARD,—Before parting from you last I told you that on getting back home I would lose no time in minutely questioning my clerk Tew with regard to all that passed between Mr. Cortelyon and himself at the signing of the will. As you may remember, the chief point that wanted clearing up was whether there was any possibility of the unsigned will having been substituted for the signed one during the two or three minutes Andry Luce was absent from the room. Tew is positive no such substitution took place. His words are: ‘The signed will was never out of my keeping from the moment the witnesses left the room till Andry Luce’s return, when, by Mr. Cortelyon’s direction, I gave the will to him to be enclosed and sealed up.’ So we remain just as wise as we were before.

“I believe I told you that, for a little while to come, I thought it would be advisable to remain quiescent in the affair while awaiting the first move on the part of Mrs. Bullivant’s solicitors, provided they thought it advisable to move at all. Well, a couple of days ago I was waited upon by Mr. Cotwell, the junior partner in a firm of Lancaster lawyers. He met me in a by no means hostile spirit, the main object of his visit being to obtain my permission to put to Tew the very question I had put to him already. Of course Tew could only give Mr. Cotwell the same answer that he had given me, and, so far as Mrs. Bullivant was concerned, there was no satisfaction to be got out of that.

“Cotwell and I had a long confabulation before he left.



From certain hints he let fall, I judge that Mrs. B. has not scrupled to give expression to her belief that she was designedly tricked by Mr. C.—that of set purpose he caused the signed will to be burnt and left the unsigned one in existence; all which is an absolute contradiction of what Tew is prepared to swear to. But what strange beliefs will not a disappointed woman cherish, more especially when she sees cause for imagining that she has been hoodwinked into the bargain!

“After all, it seems to be very doubtful whether Mrs. B. will go to law. In my opinion it would be sheer madness on her part to do so, and I have very little doubt that, privately, Cotwell thinks the same, only, of course, he is bound to bark at the bidding of his client; but when it comes to biting—we shall see.

“At any rate, I shall wait no longer, but at once proceed to take the necessary steps for legalizing the rights of the youthful heir, as if no such person as Mrs. B. were in existence.

“Will you be good enough to inform me at your convenience under whose care the child is now living, and where he may be found, provided, of course, that his present address is known to you?”

Nell's reply was sent by the next post. It was on a Friday morning that Mr. Piljoy's letter came to hand, and had she not been suffering from a cold which had reduced her voice to a mere whisper, she would have set out for London within a few hours of her receipt of it. But, although she was hungering to see the child, a delay of a few days would not matter greatly, and doubtless she would be well enough to travel (it was a matter of between two hundred and fifty and three hundred miles, and all by coach) by the following Tuesday or Wednesday at the latest.

Tuesday morning came, and found Nell's few preparations made. Her impatience would brook no further delay. Places for herself and her maid had been secured in the London coach, which passed through Tuxford shortly after midday. But a surprise was in store for her.



"Evan has been missing since yesterday."

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The postman's time for arriving at Stanbrook was ten o'clock or thereabouts. This morning he brought a letter for Miss Baynard, which she knew by the address, before opening it, to be from Mrs. Mardin. One of those intuitions which come to us we know not how or whence whispered to her that it was a bringer of ill tidings. Her fingers trembled as she opened it. All it had to tell was told in little more than a dozen words:—

"Evan has been missing since yesterday, and cannot be found anywhere. Come at once.

"HARRIET MARDIN."

Never had the journey to London seemed so long and tedious to Nell as it did on this occasion. From the coach office she drove to Lady Carradine's, where, although she had not advised her ladyship of her coming, she knew that she was sure of a welcome. Half an hour later she was on her way to Chelsea.

Mrs. Mardin received her with a burst of tears; indeed, the good soul had done little else than cry since the child had been missed. Her story did not take long in the telling.

It was a fine afternoon, and Evan had been playing, as he was often allowed to do, with some neighbors' children in a field not more than a couple of hundred yards from the house. Mrs. Mardin had been on the point of going to call him in to tea, when one of his playmates came to tell her that Evan had gone off with a tall, dark gentleman, who went up to him in the field, and, telling him that "a pretty lady" had sent for him, led him away to a carriage which was waiting in the lane close by, into which they both got and were at once driven away. From the first Mrs. Mardin had felt convinced in her own mind that the boy had been abducted by means of a ruse, and that there was no intention of bringing him back.

Then she went on to inform Nell that she had not only written to her, but to Mr. Dare as well, who fortunately happened to be in town, and had lost no time in making

his appearance at Lawn Cottage. Further, when told that Miss Baynard had been communicated with, and in all likelihood would come as fast as the coach could bring her after her receipt of the news, he had at once hired a room at an inn in the neighborhood, thinking that she might perhaps like to see him and consult with him in the matter as soon as possible after her arrival.

At the mention of Dare's name the wild-rose tints in Nell's cheeks deepened till they glowed like those of a damask rose, and the thought of so soon seeing him again sent a rush of happiness to her heart, and caused her to tingle from head to foot with a flush of gladness which yet had in it a touch of apprehension. It might be a fact that her strength had failed her in her struggle against fate, and that her heart had secretly capitulated, but the secret was her own and should never pass her lips. Her conqueror should never know that he had conquered; on that point she was resolved. And yet in the midst of her happiness she trembled at the thought of meeting Dare again. Was it because she had a fear of betraying herself in her own despite, or was it because she was conscious that she had to guard against a traitor who had betrayed her once already?

A question which Mrs. Mardin put to her did not tend to reassure her:

"Shall I send word to Mr. Dare that you are here, Miss, and that you would like to see him?"

She was still hesitating over her reply when there came a ring at the bell. "Why, that must be him!" exclaimed the widow; and so it proved to be. He had been watching for Nell's arrival, had seen her come, and, after waiting half-an-hour, had followed her to the cottage. But of all this he said nothing.

Nell strung herself up, and met him without any show of embarrassment, but not without a touch of heightened color. Dare was as easy, cool, and as much master of himself as he always was. The only difference that any one who knew him well might have marked in him was that his eyes to-day were more than ordinarily brilliant.

When he had shaken hands with Nell he sat down in the chair just vacated by Mrs. Mardin.

Nell had not forgotten the return of the mask and all that was implied thereby, and as her eyes met Dare's she could not help saying to herself, "Does he still know me simply as Miss Baynard of Stanbrook, or has he discovered in me the amateur highwayman to whom on a certain occasion he behaved with such signal kindness?" But it was a question she was no nearer being able to answer to-day than she had been the first time she asked it.

Dare plunged at once *in medias res*, like a man who has a matter in hand in dealing with which there must be neither delay nor hesitancy. Before his coming Nell had felt utterly helpless in the affair; she had neither known what to do, nor what even to suggest; but she had not been long in his company before she felt, figuratively speaking, as if a strong arm had been put round her from which she drew both comfort and support. His mere presence braced and strengthened her like a tonic.

"This is a very strange piece of business, Miss Baynard, which has brought you and me together again," he began. "I presume that Mrs. Mardin has made you acquainted with such scanty particulars as are known to her. That the case is one of abduction there can, I think, be very little doubt, if any at all. I saw the notice of Mr. Cortelyon's death in the *Times*. Presumably the stolen boy is his grandfather's heir. But doubtless you are in a position to inform me whether such is or is not the case."

"That Evan is his grandfather's heir is due to a singular and wholly inexplicable circumstance, the nature of which it may be as well that I should explain to you."

With that Nell went on to relate to him the story of the will as already known to the reader. He was intensely interested in the recital. When she had come to an end he remained for some moments lost in thought.

Then he said: "So far as I can see at present, there is only one person who would have any motive for spiriting away the boy. That person is Mrs. Bullivant, and the motive—revenge. But to revenge oneself on an innocent

child! It seems too mean and cowardly, for belief. Happily, Miss Baynard, you have seen but little of the darker side of human nature. Mean and cowardly actions are far more common than such as you have any notion of; but, if my supposition has any truth in it, the case we are now considering will go far to widen your knowledge of such things. With your permission, I will go at once to Bow Street and report the circumstances of the abduction, so far as they are known to us, to the authorities there, but without any mention of Mrs. Bullivant's name, leaving them to take whatever steps may seem advisable. As regards Mrs. Bullivant, I purpose making certain private inquiries on my own account, the result of which I will communicate to you as early as possible. Meanwhile, I would suggest that it would be as well for you to write to Mr. Piljoy informing him of the disappearance of the child, as also that the case has been reported to the proper authorities. Finally, it may be advisable that for the present my name should be kept in the background.

And so, after a little further talk they parted, with an agreement to meet again at Lawn Cottage next day. A hackney coach was fetched, and Dare saw Miss Baynard into it. She had been startled by his announcement that he was about to go personally to Bow Street. Such a proceeding on his part seemed to her the very acme of recklessness. One would have thought it was the last place in the world at which "Captain Nightshade" would have cared to show his face. She could not help admiring him for his daring, but, all the same, she felt that she should breathe more freely when she knew that he had gone and come in safety.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

ONE may be sure there was no failure of appointment next day on the part of either of our young people.

After Nell had informed Dare that the letter to Mr. Piljoy had been duly written and dispatched, and he had given her a brief account of his visit to Bow Street—where he had left a full description of the missing child, compiled with information furnished by Mrs. Mardin—there seemed little more to say or do. Of a certain task he had set before himself, and of a certain journey he meant to undertake, Dare deemed it best not to enter into any details. All he gave Miss Baynard to understand was, that nothing should be left undone on his part in his endeavor to trace the abducted heir.

But Nell felt strongly that the time had come for a clear understanding on both sides. Their masks had been seen through, their disguise penetrated. Each of them had played a double part within the other's knowledge, and yet each had pretended to ignore the fact. The day of make-believe was at an end.

She saw clearly that if any reference was to be made to their first meeting, it must come from herself. Dare, she felt sure, would never as much as hint at a circumstance, her silence about which could only lead him to conclude that she was determined to ignore it. Further than that, she wanted to set herself straight with him—to explain the motives which led to her assumption for one night only of the rôle of a "gentleman of the road." She could no longer rest satisfied with the consciousness that any action of hers should remain in his eyes under the shadow of ambiguity or suspicion.

That she had managed so far not to betray her other



and far sweeter secret she felt pretty well assured, and the knowledge comforted her exceedingly; for, while determined to brush aside all the cobwebs that had hitherto existed between them, she was equally as determined that of that hidden flower which perfumed and made beautiful the garden of her heart he should know nothing whatever.

"You and I, Mr. Dare, had met on one occasion before our first meeting under this roof," began Nell, turning her large hazel eyes, with a sort of grave questioning in them, full upon him.

It was not often that Dare was taken by surprise, but he certainly was just now. His swarthy cheeks flushed with a color that was rare to them; but it did not take him longer than half a dozen seconds to recover himself. With a low bow, he said, "It is not for me to dispute any statement Miss Baynard may choose to make."

"My reason for referring to the occasion in question is because I am desirous of explaining under what circumstances I was led to embark on that hare-brained adventure."

"Pardon me, but is any such explanation needed? Certainly it is not by me. Such an impertinence is what I never dreamed of. Why go into a matter which now belongs wholly to the past?"

"For my own satisfaction, if for nothing else."

Again Dare gravely inclined his head. It was evident Miss Baynard was determined to have her own way, although probably she had nothing more to tell him than he either knew or guessed already.

"On the occasion of our first meeting of all," resumed Nell, "I believe I remarked to you that the object of my escapade was, not to despoil some innocent traveller of his purse, but to obtain possession of a will which I knew to be in the keeping of a certain person who, on his way home, travelling by post-chaise, was bound to pass the place where I was lying in wait for him."

"So much I gathered from what you told me."

"The will in question was the one I spoke to you about

yesterday, by the provisions of which my uncle disinherited his grandson in favor of the son of the woman between whom and himself there was no relationship whatever. I thought then, as I think still, that the will was a most unjust and iniquitous one and I determined, if it were anyhow possible to do so, to get possession of it and destroy it. How ignominiously I failed in the attempt you know already."

"All this I understood from what you were good enough to tell me yesterday. That served to throw a clear light on whatever had seemed dark before."

"When I ventured on my rash attempt, which, so fortunately for all concerned, proved unsuccessful, my uncle had been given up by his doctors, and I had every reason for believing that he could not possibly live to make another will. As for the moral aspect of the affair, I think perhaps that the less I say on that score the better. I was carried away by a flame of indignation, which, so to speak, swept me off my feet, thrusting all considerations of prudence, as well as of right or wrong, into the background, blinding my moral sense for the time being, and leaving room in my mind for nothing save a burning desire, at whatever cost, to get the will into my hands. But Fate defeated my purpose, and the end I aimed at was brought about by far different means."

Miss Baynard had relieved her mind, and one usually derives a sense of comfort from being able to do that. She had put herself straight with Dare; there was no longer any question between them of a dual personality. He knew that in him she had recognized the Captain Nightshade of her adventure, and he had heard from her own lips, if there was any satisfaction in that, what he most likely knew or guessed before, that she was the masquerader in male attire who had played such an unheroic part on that occasion.

But one confidence often tends to beget another, and now, strange to say, Geoffrey Dare felt strongly impelled to crave Miss Baynard's patience for a little while in order that he might make clear to her under what stress of

circumstances he had been driven to take to the King's highway.

Miss Baynard raised no objections to listening to anything he might have to tell her. Did not Desdemona "seriously incline" to the Moor of Venice, the while he told the tale of his adventures by sea and land, and why should not she do the same?

"What I have to tell you is in the main a record of faults and follies," began Dare when leave had been given him, "but I will make my narrative as brief as possible. Let me start by remarking that I have good blood in my veins, and can trace back my ancestry in a direct line for upwards of two hundred years. It was my misfortune to lose both my parents long before I was out of my teens. On coming of age I succeeded to a fortune of forty thousand pounds, the accumulated income of my minority. Thereupon I at once plunged into all the gayeties and temptations of town life, showering my guineas right and left with lavish hands, as if they could never come to an end. Cards, dice, and the turf helped me in turn on the downward road. I had no one to counsel or warn me. The person who had filled the post of guardian to me from the date of my father's death was himself a broken man of pleasure, who encouraged rather than restrained me in the road I was treading, and had no scruple about dipping his hand into my purse whenever he had been more than usually unlucky at the tables.

"Then by and by I fell in love, or what at that time I believed to be love. But I know now, and have long known, that I was drawn to Miss Tighe as in the fable we read how hapless mariners were drawn to the sirens of the deep—because they had not enough will-power to resist their wiles. However, I was infatuated, and—which was all she cared about, for she was a compound of greed and selfishness—I lavished jewelry and presents upon her as if I could not do enough to make patent my folly. Thus it came to pass that my twenty-fourth birthday found my fortune reduced to a very few thousands. The end came shortly after with the elopement of Miss

Tighe with the man whom (next to Dick Cortelyon) I had accounted my dearest friend.

"I was still staggering from this blow when another of my 'dear friends,' by means of a forged cheque, contrived to defraud me of the poor wreck of my fortune, save a few paltry hundreds, before putting the Atlantic between himself and me.

"It was not till ruin stared me in the face, and I knew not which way to turn, that I took to the 'road'—as many a broken-down spendthrift of as good birth as I has done before me. But it is some slight salve to my conscience to know that I have never eased any man of his purse who was not well able to bear the loss, that I have never despoiled one of the opposite sex, and that I have never failed to distribute among the poor more than half of all I have taken from the rich."

He ceased, and for some moments neither of them broke the silence. His eyes had been fixed on the window as he told his tale, and he still kept them turned away from his companion. He was now softly tapping his teeth with the nails of one hand.

It was wrong, it was very wrong, and Nell admitted it to be such, but, do what she would, she could not blame him. The man, by his own admission, was a highway-man, a "minion of the moon"; of course the fact had long been known to her, but it had never been so clearly brought home to her before to-day, and yet all she could do was to pity him! Oh, it was shameful! And besides, we all know how close pity is akin to something else. She tried to despise herself, and to feel enraged with herself, but could not.

But they could not sit mum forever. It was her turn to speak. Something she must say—but what?

"The dangers and perils of the kind of life you have been speaking of are many and great." Her words faltered a little in her own despite. "Why not give it up, Mr. Dare? Why not try to find some other and more reputable way of making a living? How I wish you would! How I wish——"

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"Pardon me, Miss Baynard, but I *have* given it up." He spoke with a certain abruptness, and as he did so he turned his black eyes full upon her. "Captain Nightshade's last adventure on the road was the one in which you yourself were so singularly mixed up. From that night he resolved to turn over a fresh leaf. For one short hour he had come under an influence powerful enough and sweet enough to make a new man of him. The resolve then made has never been broken."

He spoke with an emphasis which left no room for mistake as to his meaning. Nell's eyes sank before the half-veiled passion which had suddenly leapt to life in his. Face and throat flushed a lovely color. It was all she could do not to betray that she was a-tremble in every limb.

"I am very, very glad, Mr. Dare, to hear that you have seen your way to a changed mode of life." Was it Miss Baynard who spoke or some one else? What was this strange new feeling of timidity, almost of shrinking, which had seized upon her? She might have been the veriest bread-and-butter miss fresh from school. Never had she despised herself more heartily than at that moment.

"I have told you, Miss Baynard, that I left London a broken man," resumed Dare after a pause. "I had, however, my mother's jewelry still untouched, but, no other resource being now left me, I was compelled to let it go. A little later the sum of four hundred pounds reached me anonymously, with a letter stating that it was 'conscience money' returned by a dying man, it having been won from my father twenty years before by cheating at cards. That it came as a veritable godsend I need hardly tell you."

"And yet, if I would have let you, you would still have gone on paying for Evan's maintenance."

"I had promised my dead friend that I would care for the boy as if he were my own, and, had you not come between me and him, it was a promise I was resolved to keep at every cost. I had already decided on my plans

for the future, and when I left England I should have taken the boy with me."

"When you left England, Mr. Dare?"

"I have some relations settled in Virginia who have more than once pressed me to go out to them. It was, and remains, my intention to settle there, and there to lay the foundations of a new life, very different from the old one. Now I shall have to go alone. But first I shall see this business through of my missing godson."

Why did Nell's heart sink so unaccountably at this statement of Dare's intentions? What did it matter where he might choose to make his future home? Whatever he might secretly be to her, she was nothing to him, and it was out of the question that she ever could be. She knew, and she made no attempt to disguise the fact from herself, that when he sailed away from England he would take her heart with him. But what then? Of how many women was it not the lot to give away their hearts in secret, and to go through life hopeless of a return? nay, in many cases without the man to whom it was given knowing that he had such a thing in his keeping? Her case would be merely one more added to the number.

Nell was to return to Stanbrook on the morrow, and before she and Dare parted it was arranged that he should communicate with her there as soon as he had any tidings of the missing child, and that the Bow Street authorities on their part should do the same.

There was one point with regard to which Nell wished that Dare had seen fit to enlighten her, and that was as to the nature of the relationship between himself and the mysterious Mr. Ellerslie of Rockmount, for that a relationship of some sort existed between them she now felt more convinced than ever. She had seen Mr. Ellerslie but once, and that merely for an hour by candlelight, and, while conscious of a strange illusive likeness on his part to some one, more especially about the eyes, she had been unable to recall to mind who that some one was. She knew now, and had known for some time, that the

original of the shadowy likeness was none other than Geoffrey Dare. But no mention of Mr. Ellerslie's name had escaped the latter's lips, and it was certainly not her place to question him.

There was one more point as to which her curiosity seemed doomed to remain equally unsatisfied. She was still ignorant whether she was indebted for the return of her mask to Mr. Ellerslie or to Geoffrey Dare.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE ADVENTURES OF A SNUFF-BOX.

It may or may not be remembered by the reader that in an early chapter of this veracious history mention was made of a certain Sir Peter Warrendale, and of his unavailing pursuit of his runaway niece and her lover when on their way to Gretna Green. It was also told how, on his return journey, he was stopped by a highwayman, whom, under the title of "Colonel Delnay," he had met before under rather peculiar circumstances, and was politely relieved of his purse, snuff-box, and other trifles.

No one need have wished for a worse character than that borne by Sir Peter Warrendale for a score miles round Whetton Ferris. His private life would not bear examination; as a landlord he was mean and close-fisted to a degree, and in his magisterial capacity he was never known to temper mercy with justice, but always to make a point of inflicting the maximum penalty allowed by law on any poor wretch who might have the misfortune to be haled before him.

Notwithstanding his irascibility of temper and the bluster in which he indulged when in pursuit of his runaway niece, Sir Peter was an arrant poltroon at heart, and into such a fright did he fall when his chaise was stopped by the sham Colonel Delnay that, happening to have his snuff-box in his hand, he proffered it on the impulse of the moment, together with his purse, if only his life might be spared.

The box was studded with brilliants, and Dare—for he was the "gentleman of the road"—being well aware of the mean and avaricious nature of the man, and how the loss of it would grieve him to the soul, took it, with the intention of returning it anonymously after the lapse



of a few weeks. But when, about a month later, he caused certain inquiries to be made with a view to the restitution of the box, he found that Scrope Hall was shut up, and that Sir Peter and his family had taken their departure for Bath, and from thence were expected to go to town. Then, somewhat later, came the news that Scrope Hall was to let and that the baronet had taken up his permanent residence in London.

It may here be noted that it was Captain Nightshade's invariable practice to limit his attentions to hard cash and bank-notes—to the purse of the well-to-do traveller by chaise or coach, and the plethoric money-bag of the wealthy landowner on its way to or from the local bank. Watches, snuff-boxes, rings, and other trinkets he put politely aside as "unconsidered trifles" with which he did not choose to concern himself.

Dare at the time troubled himself no further about Sir Peter's snuff-box, but when he next went to London he took it with him, with the intention of ascertaining Sir Peter's address and forwarding it to him by a trusty messenger. But it was found that Sir Peter was on the Continent, and when Dare went back to the North the box went with him.

Once more he had brought the box to town, hoping on this occasion to be able to rid himself of it. But before he had an opportunity of doing so, the news of Evan's abduction reached him, and he at once hurried off to Chelsea, and for the next two or three days his time and thoughts were taken up with far more important matters than the baronet's snuff-box. Meanwhile, with the carelessness, hardly removed from recklessness, that was characteristic of him, he carried the box about with him in his waistcoat pocket.

Now, it so happened that in the course of the forenoon of the day following that of his second interview with Miss Baynard, as he was taking a short cut to his lodgings through one of the narrow and not over savory lanes which divided Holborn from the Strand, he came on a crowd of people gathered round a man who had

fallen down in a fit, either real or simulated. Dare had pushed his way steadily, through the crowd and had got some yards beyond it, when some instinct, so to call it, caused him to clap his hand to his waistcoat. Sir Peter's jeweled snuff-box was gone!

For Geoffrey Dare such an experience was certainly a novel one. No sooner did he realize his loss than he broke into a cynical but not unamused laugh. "Confound the rogue's impudence!" he exclaimed half aloud. "Where were his eyes that he failed to recognize a gentleman of his own kidney? It is to be feared that he will find himself landed at Tyburn one of these days."

He was still standing with his hand pressed to his empty pocket, and staring at the fluctuating crowd, when a hand was laid on his shoulder and a voice said in his ear: "What's the matter, Mr. Dare? You look as if you had just lost something."

Dare, turning, recognized the speaker for John Tipway, a famous Bow Street runner, whose acquaintance he had made a couple of days before when reporting the abduction of the young heir.

"That's exactly what I have done," replied Dare.

"Pocket picked, eh?"

Dare nodded.

"Anything of consequence?"

"A very valuable snuff-box."

"Ah-ha! A noted neighborhood this for petty larceny. Hardly a worse anywhere. But come along with me to the office—I'm on my way there—and lodge a description of the missing property. Who knows but we may be able to recover it for you from the pawnbroker's or somewhere else."

Dare hesitated, and well he might, considering under what circumstances the box had come into his possession. But in the company of Mr. Tipway to have hesitated over a matter of that sort would have tended to provoke suspicion, and that was what he could not afford to do. So he accompanied the runner to Bow Street—not with-

out a certain relish for the comedy of the situation—and there furnished a description of the stolen box, leaving an address, that of a humble lodging in a back street in Bloomsbury, at which any tidings of it might be communicated to him.

By that night's coach he started for the North in order to take up the quest to which he had vowed himself.

About a fortnight later the snuff-box was found in the possession of a swell-mob who had been arrested for another offence.

Now, it so fell out that Sir Peter Warrendale, who was much put about by the loss of his box—although he had himself almost thrust it into the hands of the self-styled Colonel Delnay—not only because it was intrinsically valuable, but because it was a cherished heirloom, had, on his arrival in town some weeks after his encounter with the highwayman, given a description of it at Bow Street, on the faint chance that it might turn up at one of the London pawnshops, or in some other fashion. A peculiarity of the box was that it had a false bottom, a fact which Dare had failed to discover. But it was a feature which Sir Peter, in his account of the box, had not forgotten to specify, so that the Bow Street official, who happened to be blessed with a good memory, found himself in possession of an article which was claimed by two different owners and was stated to have been stolen from both!

Sir Peter Warrendale was communicated with, and at once identified the box as his property, and explained the mystery of the false bottom, under which lay *perdu* a miniature of his great-grandmother when a beauty of eighteen.

The question that now put itself was by what means had the box come into Dare's possession? It was a question which only himself could answer. So a messenger was sent to his lodgings with a request that he would go to Bow Street and identify the box. But Dare was not there, and all the information his landlady could

supply was that he had gone into the country and that the date of his return was uncertain.

Accordingly, a message was left requesting his presence at Bow Street immediately upon his return to town. Meanwhile the snuff-box remained in the hands of the authorities.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## IN QUEST OF THE MISSING HEIR.

MR. GEOFFREY DARE alighted from the London coach at Tuxford, a small market-town some half dozen miles from Uplands.

Next morning he set about making certain inquiries, which resulted in his ascertaining that Uplands was now empty and to let, and that Mrs. Bullivant had transferred herself and her belongings to a much smaller house, known as Homecroft, about twenty miles away on the other side of the country. The nearest town to Homecroft was Broxham, a place of some twelve thousand inhabitants, and thither Dare lost no time in betaking himself.

After breakfast next morning he hired a horse and started for a long ride. When he got back in the early evening he had learnt a good deal more about Homecroft than he knew when he set out. Whether the particulars thus gathered by him would prove of any after use it was too early to determine: in point of fact, he had not yet decided upon his course of action. The subject was one which needed careful consideration if a fiasco were to be avoided, and just then he was turning it over and over in his mind.

Next day was Broxham horse and cattle fair, and from early morn till late at night the little town was a busy scene in which business and pleasure were strangely commingled. Dare was a lover of horseflesh, and he found much to interest him in a casual way as he strolled idly about the fair, mentally chewing over the question of what his next step ought to be in the undertaking to which he had bound himself.

In those days even more than now a horse fair acted

as a sure magnet for bringing together a small crowd of gypsies, and certainly there was no lack of them on this occasion at Broxham.

Dare had come across a couple of their encampments while riding out the day before, but it was not till to-day when, as he stood on the fringe of the crowd, listening to the chaffering and bargaining, but thinking of other things, a smiling, black-eyed, ruddy-lipped *chi* sidled up to him and asked him to cross her hand with a bit of silver, that of a sudden an idea came to him which seemed to open up a way out of the difficulty with which he had been perplexing his brain ever since he left London.

If Dare crossed the girl's hand with a piece of silver, it was not with the view of having his fortune told. Drawing her further apart from the crowd, he stood in earnest talk with her for several minutes, nor did they part till they had come to a mutual understanding. Dare's last words to the girl were, "Tell your father that he may expect to see me at dusk to-morrow."

Dare was not unacquainted with Romany life and Romany ways. As a lad of seventeen he had once spent a month of *vie intime* at one of their encampments, and the knowledge then acquired by him he hoped to be able to turn to good account on the present occasion.

Not till the sun had dipped below the horizon did he set out next afternoon to walk the couple of miles or more which would bring him to a certain furze-lined hollow among the moors, where a number of gypsies whom the fair had brought into the neighborhood had made their temporary home. He had got about half-way, and was on the point of turning off the high-road—which was here unfenced and open to the moors on both sides—at a place previously described to him, when he was suddenly confronted by a man who started up from behind a thick clump of brambles. Dare came to a halt, and for a few moments the two stood measuring each other in silence.

The stranger, an unmistakable gypsy, was the first to

speak: "You are the *gorgio* that had something to say to my daughter yesterday at the fair?"

"I am."

"And you want her, with my leave, to do something for you for which you are willing to pay us in good red gold?"

"You could not have put the case in fewer words."

"Well, here we are, with only the rising moon and our own shadows for company. We could not have a better chance for saying what is to be said."

Nothing could have suited Dare's purpose better.

The *gryengro*, or horse-dealer, proceeded to charge and light his pipe, while Dare refreshed himself with a copious pinch of snuff. Then, by the light of the young moon, as they slowly paced the soft turf to and fro, the latter went on to unfold his wishes:

"About a mile on the other side of Broxham there stands in its own grounds a small country house, the name of which is Homecroft. After remaining empty for a long time, it has now found a tenant in the person of Mrs. Bullivant, whose husband died a few years ago, and whose one child, a boy of five or six, is at present from home, most probably on a visit to his grandfather, Lord Cossington. Now, although her own child is away, I have strong reasons for believing that Mrs. Bullivant has another child, who has been stolen away from his friends, hidden in the house, whose presence there is only known to the *rawni* herself and two or three of her domestics. So, what I want to have found out for me is, whether there is, or is not, such a child as the one I speak of under the roof of Homecroft, and the first question is, whether your daughter can obtain that information for me without arousing any suspicion on the part of Mrs. Bullivant or any of her people."

To this the gypsy, whose name was Enoch Bosworth, replied that he had very little doubt his daughter Rosilla could manage to obtain the required information if time were allowed her, and she was allowed to go to work in her own way in the affair. Dare did not care how she

went to work, so long as she got him the needed particulars. It then became a question of terms between the two men, and these having been satisfactorily arranged, they parted, with an agreement to meet again at the same hour and place four evenings later.

Although Dare kept his appointment to the minute, he found the *gryengro* and his daughter waiting for him, and it soon appeared that Rosilla had indeed made good use of her time. She was already in a position to assure him that his belief in the presence of a strange child at Homecroft was amply justified. Such a child was there, a boy, with regard to whom none of the domestics knew anything—neither his name, where he came from, the connection between him and the mistress of Homecroft, or, in point of fact, why he was there at all. A middle-aged woman who had been in Mrs. Bullivant's service for a number of years, was his sole attendant, and none of the other servants were ever allowed to speak to him—not that much chance of doing so was given them, a couple of rooms having been set apart for the boy and the woman, into which they were forbidden to penetrate.

All this information the artful Rosilla, in the exercise of her calling as a fortune-teller, had succeeded in worming out of Mrs. Bullivant's maid, a girl of the name of Moggy Dredge, who, for some reason or other, had conceived a violent dislike for her mistress—an admission of which Dare did not fail to see the importance.

He must contrive an interview with the girl Dredge, and this Rosilla was commissioned to arrange for. If Mrs. Bullivant's maid would name her own time and place for meeting a certain gentleman, name unknown, and there answer a few questions he would put to her having no reference to herself or her own business, she would find her pocket the richer by a couple of guineas.

Rosilla at once undertook to do her best to arrange the meeting in question, which took place a couple evenings later at a solitary spot a little way outside the palings of the Homecroft grounds.

The gypsy-girl, of her own accord, went a little way



apart out of hearing while the *gorgio* and the lady's-maid said what they had to say to each other.

Even before she quite comprehended what it was Dare wanted her to do, Moggy did not hesitate to confess that, in her own words, she hated her mistress "worse than poison," and that because of the latter's treatment of her, and of the insults she saw fit to heap upon her. In reply to this, Dare very naturally asked her why she did not leave Mrs. Bullivant and go into service elsewhere. Thereupon Moggy burst out crying, and, after sobbing quietly for a little while, confided to Dare that she had had a "misfortune," and had thereby forfeited her character, and that it was Mrs. Bullivant's knowledge of this fact which enabled her to trample on the unhappy girl in the way she did.

Moggy could tell Dare little more about the strange child than he had already learnt from Rosilla. Nor had he expected that she would be able to do so. What he had now to arrange for was the future, and he did not part from the girl till she had given him her promise to furnish him daily with a written report of everything she could hear or gather having reference to the child. This report she was to place each day after nightfall in the hollow of a certain tree, whence it would be fetched by Rosilla, who would play the part of messenger between her and Dare. Later, there would be three more guineas for her, and she confessed that she was badly in need of money to help to pay for the keep of her child.

Moggy kept her promise, and night after night Dare received at the hands of the gypsy-girl her brief and half-illegible reports, the writing of which caused her many groans, and was the cause of much perturbation of spirit. But it was not till ten days had gone by that she found anything of consequence to communicate. Then, indeed, her news was of a sufficiently startling kind.

It had been arranged, Moggy wrote, that Mrs. Balchin, the child's attendant, together with her husband, who was Mrs. Bullivant's coachman, were to start next evening for Liverpool on their way to America, the report be-

ing that, by the death of a relative in the States, they had come in for a small fortune, which, however, could not be paid over to them without their presence on the spot. But it was not till Dare had got nearly to the end of Moggy's ill-spelt effusion—he was painfully deciphering it in his room at the inn by the light of a solitary candle—that of a sudden he sat up and gave vent to a low whistle. The child, the mysterious child, about whom none of the servants at Homecroft knew anything, was to accompany the Balchins on their long journey—a journey, in those days, infinitely more formidable than it is now.

The little party of three were to leave Homecroft in Mrs. Bullivant's carriage at half-past eight P.M., so as to reach Tuxford in time to catch the night coach bound for the south.

Dare sat for some time staring at the letter, but without seeing it, when he had succeeded in mastering its contents. What step ought he to take next? was the question he was revolving in his brain, and for some time no satisfactory answer was forthcoming.

Of course, all along he had been without any absolute certainty that the child in question was young Evan Cortelyon. Morally sure he might be, but that was hardly foundation enough on which to base any action of a definite kind. If he were to go to Piljoy and state his conviction in the matter, what could the lawyer do? At present no evidence was available conclusive enough to justify an application for a warrant, especially against a person of the social standing of the Hon. Mrs. Bullivant. And yet, if the child were really Evan (as to which he felt no sort of doubt in his own mind), then must he be rescued at every cost.

For a full hour he sat with bent brows, excogitating one scheme after another, only to reject each in turn, till he had worked round to the notion which had struck him first of all, but which he had put temporarily aside till he had satisfied himself that no other plan was equally feasible.

At length he rose abruptly and pushed back his chair.

"'Tis the only way," he said aloud. "'Twas the first notion that came to me, and if I had only had the sense to embrace it there and then, I might have saved myself all this useless muddling of my brains. A year ago—nay, far later than that—I should not have hesitated a moment; but now——! What has come over me? What strange change has been at work within me? Is that a conundrum very hard to crack, Geoff, my boy? It may be true, after all, that the moon is made of green cheese."

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE HON. MRS. BULLIVANT TO CAPTAIN FERRIS.

"My dear Wilton," wrote Mrs. Bullivant to her half-brother a couple of days subsequently to the events recorded in the last chapter, "I have some very singular news for you which I lose no time in communicating; but whether—bearing in mind the peculiar features of the case—you will be inclined to stigmatize it as bad news or to bless it as good, seems to me somewhat problematical, and I at once confess that I am myself at a loss to know in which light to regard it.

"Although my disappointment in the matter of Mr. Cortelyon's will was so extreme as almost for a time to drive me beyond myself, and to stir up within me feelings and passions to which I had been a stranger aforetime, and although I took a silent oath that, come what might, I would be revenged for what I then regarded, and still regard, as the vile trick of which I was made the victim; yet am I inclined to think that had it not been for your persistent fanning of the flame which just then burnt so fiercely within me, my passion would gradually have cooled down, my reason would have again found its equipoise, and I should never have given my sanction to a certain step, the rashness and futility of which I recognized almost from the moment of agreeing to it.

"Mind, in writing this I am not imputing any blame to you; or, if there is any, we share it on equal terms. Your own disappointment was bitter enough in all conscience to goad you on to do things from which, at another time and in your calmer moments, you would have turned away as being not merely useless, but impolitic.

"From the moment you placed young Cortelyon in my

hands my almost insane longing to be revenged for the foul wrong his grandfather had done me slackened and grew faint, and I recognized with overwhelming clearness what a blunder we had made and with what a burden I had saddled myself. Now that I had got the child into my keeping what was I to do with him? There was the rub. As for carrying out the dark hint you one day let drop—only by way of trying me, I feel sure, and with no thought that I would agree to act on it—as you know, I shrank from it aghast. I have a child of my own, and I could not forget it; and, little cause as I had to love young C., whatever else might happen to him his life was absolutely safe so long as he remained under my roof. But the perplexing question of how to dispose of him was one which allowed me no rest.

“As you are aware, from the date of the lad’s arrival at Homcroft I put him into the sole charge of Mrs. Balchin (whom, as I have good reason for knowing, I can thoroughly trust), and kept him wholly secluded from the rest of the household, for whose benefit I invented a little fable explanatory of my reasons for acting as I did, but to what extent they believed it I have no means of knowing.

“If I had been uncomfortable before, you may imagine what effect your letter had on me in which you informed me that a reward of five hundred pounds was offered for the recovery of the missing heir. For the next few days I was like a distracted woman, turning over in my mind a dozen schemes, each one more wild and impracticable than the last.

“Then, all at once, the black clouds opened and a way of escape lay clear before me.

“As I daresay you may remember, not only Mrs. Balchin, but her husband, is in my service, the latter having acted as my coachman ever since my marriage. Well, a few mornings ago Balchin received a letter from a firm of lawyers in New York informing him that a legacy equivalent to five hundred pounds of English money had been left him by an uncle lately deceased, but that it would be

requisite for him to go over to the States, and be prepared to prove his identity, before the money could be paid him. When he came to me and showed me his letter, and told me all this, I could have found it in my heart to embrace him.

"Can you guess, *mon cher frère*, what were the first words I said to myself? They were these: 'Balchin's wife shall keep him company on the voyage, and with them they shall take young Cortelyon. *But they shall come back alone.*'

"There is no need to trouble you with details. It will be enough to state that by the evening of the second day after Balchin's receipt of the letter all arrangements had been made, and the little party of three were ready to start. They were to have the use of my carriage as far as Tuxford, where they would join the night coach for the south on their way to Liverpool, from which port they would sail by the first available packet for New York, Balchin is a capable man, and I had no fear about his failing to carry out the instructions laid down for him. Of course the expenses of the journey, so far as his wife and the child were concerned, were to be defrayed by me.

"I ought to mention here that I had often heard Mrs. Balchin refer to her numerous clan of cousins in America, and when I put the case before her she readily engaged, for a hundred pounds paid down, to get the boy permanently adopted by one of them. As you know, I could ill spare any such sum, but I would have made a still greater sacrifice rather than let the opportunity go by of ridding myself of what had latterly become the incubus of my life.

"The clocks were striking nine when they started, which would leave them an hour and a-half for the journey to Tuxford. Balchin was on the box, with the stable-boy beside him, whom it was necessary to take in order that he might bring back the carriage. Inside were Mrs. Balchin and the child, the latter soundly asleep under the influence of a narcotic. You can but faintly imagine with

what an intense feeling of relief I watched the carriage disappear in the soft darkness of the autumn night.

"You will be wondering by this time as to the nature of the singular news which I began this letter by telling you I had to communicate. You shall now be told it, what I have written so far being merely the needful introduction thereto.

"Imagine, then, if you can, my feelings of mingled amazement and alarm when, shortly after ten o'clock, my maid came to tell me that the carriage had just returned, and that Balchin was very anxious to speak to me. I ordered him to be at once admitted, and the moment I set eyes on his face I knew that something had gone amiss, although the mere fact of his presence there was enough to convince me on that point.

"Without giving him time to speak, I said quickly : 'Where is the child? Nothing has happened to him I hope?'

"'Only this, ma'am, that we've been robbed of him,' was his reply.

"And so it proved to be. As they were crossing Blaydon Heath they had been stopped by a masked horseman carrying a pistol in one hand and a small lantern in the other, who had bidden Balchin bring the carriage to a halt, on pain of instant death. Naturally the man was much frightened, seeing that in his wife's purse was not merely the passage-money for all three, but the hundred pounds given by me for the purpose just named. But in that respect his fears proved to be unfounded. Riding up to the carriage window, the horseman first turned his lantern full on Mrs. Balchin and then on the face of the sleeping child. 'As I thought, madam, as I thought,' he said. 'I find you here in possession of property which does not belong to you. With your good pleasure I will relieve you of it. Nay, no demur, or you will find it the worse for you. Child-stealing, allow me to remind you, is a crime punishable with a long term of transportation. Hand the boy over to me at once, and thank your lucky stars that you are allowed to escape so easily.'



"The compliments of Captain Nightshade."

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"What could the woman do but comply? Indeed, as she has since told me, she was nearly frightened out of her wits. Without dismounting, the horseman opened the carriage door, and the child, still sleeping soundly, was transferred to him. Placing the boy in front of him, with one arm round him, he backed his horse from the carriage, and then addressing Balchin, said, 'You can drive back home, and when you get there give my compliments to your mistress—the compliments of Captain Nightshade—and tell her she ought to go down on her knees and thank me for having saved her from the consequences of a most shameful crime.' With that he waved his hand, set spur to his horse, and cantered off.

"Such was the story brought back by Balchin.

"Captain Nightshade, I must tell you, is a notorious highwayman who for two or three years past has been the terror of this part of England. For the last six or seven months, however, nothing has been heard of him, and everybody was hoping that he had seen fit to transfer his attentions elsewhere.

"Now, tell me this if you can. How did he, of all people in the world, succeed in discovering that young C. was hidden under my roof, and that he was about to be smuggled away at that particular time? It is a question which the oftener I ask it, the more bewildered I become. Somebody must have acted the part of spy and traitor, but who is that somebody? and through what mysterious channel did he or she succeed in communicating my intentions to the highwayman? I have my suspicions in the matter, but I refrain from inflicting them upon you.

"Captain Nightshade's motive in getting hold of the boy is as plain as a pikestaff. He will restore him to his friends, and claim the reward offered for his recovery.

"And after such an ignominious fashion has the scheme of revenge hatched by you, and in a weak moment acceded to by me, collapsed and crumbled to pieces. That I should ever have allowed myself to be mixed up with any such affair seems to me, writing now, wholly inconceivable; but

it merely serves to prove to what lengths a woman will go when blinded by passion, spite, and the overthrow of her most cherished hopes.

"Somehow, I have not much fear that the friends of young C., even should the facts of the case be made known to them, will take any further steps in the affair. They will not, I am quite sure, if Miss Baynard has any say in the affair. I could love that girl, Wilton, were it in my nature to love anybody. And to think that not a shilling of her great-uncle's wealth will come to her! It is most shameful.

"But enough, I am tired, and must leave till another day my answers to certain questions which you ask in your last letter.

"Your affectionate sister,

"ONORIA BULLIVANT."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A JOYFUL SURPRISE.

ALL this time Miss Baynard was waiting at Stanbrook for the news which seemed so long in coming.

As one slow day followed another without bringing the longed-for tidings her heart grew sick within her. Perhaps the boy had been spirited out of the country, and she should never set eyes on him again; perhaps something worse even than that had befallen him. Mr. Piljoy came over on business connected with the estate, but brought no comfort with him. Till some tidings of the missing heir should come to hand no steps whatever could be taken with reference to the settlement of the property. After his receipt of Nell's letter containing the news of the abduction he had communicated direct with the authorities in London, but, beyond a reply to the effect that the case was already in hand and having their best attention, he had heard nothing. He had more than one question to put to Miss Baynard having reference to Mr. Geoffrey Dare, to which she contented herself with replying that Dare had been her cousin's bosom friend, and was the missing boy's godfather, and had promised poor Dick to look after him as if he were his own son. What would have been Mr. Piljoy's horror and amazement had he been told that Mr. Geoffrey Dare and the notorious Captain Nightshade were one and the same person! Nell could not help laughing a little to herself as her imagination conjured up the picture.

But our heroine's state of soul-wearing suspense was not destined to last much longer.

On the evening of the second day after Mr. Piljoy's return home a letter was brought her which caused her to start with amazement the moment her eyes fell on it,

The address was in the same writing as that of the packet in which her lost mask had been returned to her. For a space of some seconds she stood staring at it like one fascinated; then with fingers that shook a little she broke the seal and tore open the letter. Here is what she read: "Mr. Cope-Ellerslie presents his compliments to Miss Baynard, and has much happiness in informing her that news has reached him not only of the safety but of the whereabouts of her young relative, Master Evan Cortelyon.

"Should Miss Baynard think it worth her while to come as far as Rockmount, Mr. Ellerslie will be pleased to tell her all that has come to his knowledge in connection with the affair, in which case the bearer of this letter is instructed to act as her guide and escort on the journey."

She could hardly make out the last few lines for the happy tears which already dimmed her eyes, and so had to read them again.

Go to Rockmount! Of course she would. Had it been to the end of Europe she would have gone, and ten minutes later she was ready to start. Day was already drawing to dusk, and timorous-hearted Mrs. Budd would fain have persuaded her to put off her journey till morning. But timid counsels had never prevailed with Nell, and it was not in the least likely that they would in a case like the present.

She had at once sent word to have her mare saddled and brought round, and it was waiting for her, in charge of John Dyce, by the time she was ready. Nell was hardly surprised at finding that the man who had brought the letter, and who was waiting for an answer to it, was the one who on the occasion of her first sojourn at Rockmount had acted as her guide as far as the Whinbarrow road. Would he recognize in her the young spark whom he had then escorted? It seemed hardly likely that he would, and in any case, it did not matter greatly. It was far more probable that he would recognize her mare Peggy.

"I am going back with you to Rockmount," she said to him.

"All right, mum," he replied, with a tug at his forelock. "You couldn't have a finer evenin' for a ride."

Neither man nor horse had lacked for refreshment while waiting. And so presently they set out, Miss Baynard leading the way by about a dozen yards. This lasted till they had gone some six or eight miles, and had reached a point where it became necessary to diverge from the great highway they had hitherto been traversing and take to one of the tortuous cross-country roads which branched off into the desolate region of fells and moors. Then the position of the two was reversed, and it was the man who led the way.

It was quite dark by the time they reached Rockmount, or as nearly so as it ever is on a clear, starlit autumnal night. As Miss Baynard drew rein in front of the house, her mind was busy with the incidents of that other night, now many months old, when one whom she had since learnt to love in secret with all the fervency of a first great passion had brought her to the door of Rockmount and had there left her. How full of incident for her those months had been! What a changed life, both inwardly and outwardly, had hers become between then and now!

Her guide, having dismounted, gave a resounding knock on the great oaken door and then helped Miss Baynard to alight. When that was done he led the horses away towards the back premises, and the same instant there was the sound of bolts and bars being unloosened one by one. So remote and lonely was the house that it was no wonder the inmates looked carefully to their fastenings.

Then the door was opened, disclosing the same sour-visaged old serving-man, carrying a lighted candle, whom Nell had seen on the first occasion.

"Be good enough to tell your master that Miss Baynard is here," she said.

Making an arch of one of his knotted hands, he peered at her for a moment or two from under it. Then he said: The Master is expecting yo. Will yo be pleased to come in?"

And so for the second time, Nell crossed the threshold

of Rockmount. The door having been shut behind her, the old fellow led the way across the hall, and so brought her presently to the same sparsely furnished room with which she was already so well acquainted. Then she was left alone.

As Nell looked round the room she could have fancied that only a few hours had gone by since she was last there. The candles were alight, a cheerful fire was burning in the grate; the heavy curtains of faded red moreen were closely drawn; nothing was changed. From moment to moment she looked to see Mr. Cope-Ellerslie enter.

Would he, when they met, treat her as a stranger, or as one whom he knew already? It was a question she had asked herself more than once while on her way to Rockmount. That he knew the pseudo Mr. Frank Nevill to be none other than Miss Baynard, of Stanbrook, he had himself furnished her with proof positive in the return of her mask; but did he know at the time he gave her a night's lodging who she was, or did he not discover it till afterwards? And, in either case, by what mysterious means had he made the discovery? She had not forgotten, nor was it likely she should forget, that in the chamber assigned her at Rockmount she had found a certain feminine garment, but whether placed there by accident or design she had no means whatever of knowing. If by design, then must Mr. Ellerslie from the first have penetrated the secret of her sex. It was a thought which, even after all this time, caused the blood to tingle in her veins.

But these questions, personal to herself, perplexing though they were, did not cause her for more than a minute or two at a time to lose sight of the main object which had brought her to Rockmount, while wholly at a loss to imagine how it had come to pass that the first news of the lost child should have reached her through Mr. Ellerslie, and neither through Bow Street nor Geoffrey Dare. Not that it mattered greatly, so long as news of him had come to hand. She was all impatience to hear what Mr. Ellerslie had to tell her.

She could not help starting when the door opened, think-

ing to see him ; but it was Mrs. Dobson, the housekeeper, who now came in. Nell had by no means forgotten Mrs. Dobson, and she scrutinized her a little anxiously. Would the housekeeper recognize her? Would there be anything in her manner to betray a knowledge of their having ever met before?

Mrs. Dobson, having shut the door, came forward a little way, crossed her hands in front of her, and made Miss Baynard a respectful curtsy. Then their eyes met, and Nell read nothing in those of the other which she might not have read in the eyes of any stranger. Undisguised admiration they betrayed of a surety, but to that our young lady was so used that she thought nothing of it.

"Madam," began the housekeeper, with the tone and manner of a well-bred dependent, "my master desires me to say that in another room there is a very charming little picture, a view of which he feels sure would please you vastly. If you will be good enough to accompany me I will conduct you to it."

Miss Baynard stared at the housekeeper with wide-set eyes. "A picture!" she said. "Surely Mr. Ellerslie has not asked me to Rockmount merely to show me a picture!"

"That is more than I can say, miss. My business is simply to repeat my master's message. But I feel quite sure that if you knew what the picture is, you would never forgive yourself for having refused to see it. Do come, miss," she added next moment, seeing that Miss Baynard still hesitated.

"Very well, I will go with you," said Nell.

Mrs. Dobson led the way through the gloomy old house to a bedroom on the first floor, but not the one occupied by Miss Baynard on the occasion of her first visit to Rockmount, although differing very little from it in its furniture and appointments, except in one particular. In the middle of the floor stood a couch, to which Nell's eyes travelled instinctively the moment she entered the room. It had been made up temporarily with pillows and coverlets, so as to form a child's bed. A solitary wax candle was alight on the chimney-piece.



A low, inarticulate cry broke from Nell. Brushing past the housekeeper, she went swiftly forward and bent over the couch. The truth had flashed across her as she set foot over the threshold, and now her eyes verified it. There, in rosy slumber, his cheek pillowed on one hand, the other arm flung with graceful abandon outside the coverlet, lay the missing child. This was the picture Mr. Ellerslie had invited her to come and see!

Tears rushed to her eyes and overbrimmed them; a sob broke in her throat. Not for a full minute, for fear of waking him, did she venture to stoop and touch the peach-bloom of his cheek with her lips. Her heart was full, and not till a few more moments had gone by would she trust herself to speak. The housekeeper was at her elbow.

"Who brought him, and how long has he been here?" she asked.

"I found him keeping master company in the library when I came downstairs this morning. Some one had brought him in the course of the night. He has been playing about on the moors a good part of the day—not, of course, without some one to look after him—and came to bed thoroughly tired out. What a dear little gentleman he is! Not a bit like many children I've known, but trying to make friends with everybody. I suppose, miss, that you won't have any objection to sharing this room with him to-night?"

Miss Baynard was startled. "But I have not seen Mr. Ellerslie yet," she objected. "When his message reached me, my only aim was to lose no time in getting here, and certainly I had no thought or intention of staying the night at Rockmount."

"But consider the lateness of the hour, miss; and you would hardly care, I should think, to have the child wakened in order to take him a long journey in the middle of the night."

"No, I certainly should not care for that. But when I left home I did not know that Evan had been found, and that I was going to see him; only that Mr. Ellerslie had a message of some kind for me which concerned him."

"Well, miss, master certainly expects you to stay till morning, and asked me hours ago to arrange accordingly. But most likely he will speak to you himself about it. And now, if you are ready, we will go downstairs."

But Nell could not go without another kiss. "He is not left alone while he sleeps," remarked Mrs. Dobson as they left the room; "my niece watches by him."

Downstairs Miss Baynard found the table laid for one person, and three minutes later a dainty little supper was brought in.

"When shall I see Mr. Ellerslie?" she asked, as the housekeeper was on the point of leaving the room.

"He will do himself the honor of waiting upon you in the course of half an hour."

It was very rarely that Nell's appetite failed her, and her long ride through the night air had, if anything, tended to sharpen it on the present occasion. She was a healthy English girl, who came of a healthy stock. She hardly knew that she had such things as nerves. She was neither hysterical, nor anæmic, nor introspective. No *fin-de-siècle* questions troubled her, because the century was yet in its infancy. She was a warm-hearted, warm-blooded creature, somewhat too impulsive perhaps, and too easily led away by her own generous instincts, and although an existence such as hers would nowadays be regarded as intolerably narrow and antiquated, yet was her life an exemplar of several of those minor if homely virtues with which so many of our up-to-date young women profess to be, and probably are, wholly unacquainted, and to regard with silent contempt. At any rate, Miss Baynard did full justice to her supper.

Scarcely had the table been cleared when Mr. Ellerslie entered the room. To Nell it seemed as if she might have parted from him no longer ago than the day before, so wholly unchanged was he from the picture of him which still lived so freshly in her memory. There was the long, grizzled hair parted down the middle, the short Vanduyck beard and moustache, the black velvet skull cap, and the dark monkish robe which wrapped him from

head to foot. There, too, was the set, mask-like face with its thousands of fine wrinkles, which from a little distance looked as if it were carved out of old ivory, a face which seemed to emphasize the pair of brilliant black eyes that looked out from under their heavy penthouse brows with an illusive something in them which reminded Nell strangely of Geoffrey Dare.

As he entered the room Miss Baynard rose and advanced to meet him with both hands outstretched. "Oh, Mr. Ellerslie!" she said, and in her voice there was a veiled emotion not far removed from tears, "how can I ever thank you enough, how ever be sufficiently grateful to you, for the glad surprise you have given me this evening? Surely you must be a necromancer, or the good wizard of a fairy tale, for to me it seems nothing less than a fairy tale to have one I hold so dear restored to me in this fashion."

Mr. Ellerslie took her hands in his, bent over them, and raised them for a second to his lips. "Nay, nay, my dear young lady," he replied, "if any thanks be due in the matter—though why there should be I fail to see—then must they fall not to my share, but to that of my nephew, Geoffrey Dare."

An involuntary "Oh!" broke from Miss Baynard. His nephew! It was a revelation which seemed to throw light on several things.

"It was Geoff who brought the child here at a late hour last night, asleep and perched on his horse in front of him. As to whom, where, and how he picked the youngster up, I must refer you to him in person."

"But when shall I see Mr. Dare? Is he not here?"

"At present he is not. Some business called him away in the course of the day. But I have his promise that he will be back not later than ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"And I shall see him then?"

"Certainly you will, my dear Miss Baynard. He will be here immediately after breakfast."

By this time he had led her back to her chair, and had

seated himself in another on the opposite side of the hearth.

Miss Baynard hesitated a moment, then she said: "When I left Stanbrook in consequence of your message, Mr. Ellerslie, it was certainly without any design of staying over night at Rockmount."

"But, my dear young lady, as circumstances have fallen out, I fail to see how you can very well help yourself; that is to say, unless it is your intention to leave your young cousin for a time under my charge, a charge, I need scarcely tell you, which I will very gladly undertake."

"You are very good, Mr. Ellerslie, but when I go back Evan must go with me."

"Then permit me to observe that, putting yourself out of the question, the hour is far too late a one for the child to travel." It was the same argument the housekeeper had made use of.

"Besides, where's your hurry?" resumed Mr. Ellerslie. "The boy is restored to you, and that, as I take it, is the main thing. The rest's but leather and prunella."

"You might have added, Mr. Ellerslie, by way of clinching your argument, that it would not be the first time I have slept under the roof of Rockmount."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Ellerslie, with a palpable start.

"A certain Mr. Frank Nevill sought and found shelter here one night early in the present year. It may be that you have not quite forgotten the young man in question?"

"I have not by any means forgotten him."

"Furthermore, you have been for some time aware—for how long I do not know—that the aforesaid Mr. Nevill and Miss Baynard, of Stanbrook, were and are one and the same person. And how I happen to know this I will now make clear to you. For a certain reason—which at the time seemed to him all-powerful, but which after-circumstances turned to foolishness—the *soi-disant* Frank Nevill chose, for one night, to enact the part of an amateur highwayman, and wound up his adventure by accepting the hospitality of Rockmount. On quitting here next morning, by some oversight he left his mask behind him.

Time passed on, and when three or four months had gone by the missing mask was forwarded through the post to Miss Baynard, but without any word of explanation, or any clue to the sender of it. And there the matter rested till this afternoon, when Miss Baynard received a note from Mr. Ellerslie informing her that he had certain news to communicate. To Miss B. the writing seemed not wholly strange, and on comparing it with the address on the sheet of paper, which she had kept, in which the mask had been enclosed, she could not doubt that they had both emanated from one pen. But doubtless much of this is old news to you, Mr. Ellerslie. To Mr. Dare my double identity has for some time been no secret, and he——”

Mr. Ellerslie held up his hand. “Pardon me. Not even to me would my nephew speak of matters which involved a point of honor between himself and another. That which you have just told me has now become a matter of little or no moment, and such being the case, there can be no harm in my confessing that the identity of Miss Baynard with Mr. Frank Nevill was suspected by me almost from the first. Why was the same mare ridden by both, as one of my men, who chanced on Miss Baynard next day when on her way back to Stanbrook, averred to be the fact? But it was my housekeeper who was the first to raise a doubt in my mind with regard to the sex of ‘Mr. Frank Nevill.’ That young blade had not been ten minutes under my roof before she came to me and said, ‘You may take my word for it, sir, that yon young gentleman in the oak parlor is no more a gentleman than I am, and would be far more at home in petticoats than in what he’s wearing now.’ Evidently Mrs. Dobson knew what she was talking about. She is a woman of penetration, and I have a great respect for her.”

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## A PARTING AND A LETTER.

NEXT morning Miss Baynard and Evan breakfasted alone, Mr. Ellerslie remaining invisible. But Nell, who was becoming accustomed to her host's eccentricities, was hardly surprised at his non-appearance. Not much appetite had she this morning. Dare was coming at ten o'clock, and the thought of her forthcoming interview with him disturbed her strangely. They were about to part. When she had given expression to her gratitude, and they had taken leave of each other, and she had gone her way and he his, what chance or likelihood was there of their ever meeting again? By his own confession his business in England was now at an end; in a few days, or a few weeks at the latest, he would have left its shores, never to return; they would have passed out of each other's life, and, except for one thing, all would be as it was before they first met.

Yes, save and except for one thing, but one which to Nell made all imaginable difference. Then she had held her heart fast in her own keeping, but what had become of the poor thing now? She had given it away without having been asked for it. Could anything be more shameful? It was gone from her past reclaiming; lost to her forever; and yet he into whose keeping it had been given knew nothing about it. And he never would know. He would carry it away with him, all unwitting, and to all outward seeming, life with her would go on just as before. She alone would know that she had lost something which nothing else could make up to her, that some of the magic had faded out of existence, and that the sun no longer shone quite so brightly as it had been used to do.

Hardly had the clocks struck ten when there came a tap at the door, which was followed by the entrance of Geoffrey Dare. Young Evan was on the floor busied with some toys which the housekeeper had disinterred for him out of one of the garrets. The moment he saw who the newcomer was, he called out: "Uncle Geoff, come here. One of my horses has only got three legs, and I want you to make me a new one."

"Presently, my dear boy, presently," he replied, as, after pausing for a moment at the door, he went slowly forward, his eyes fixed full on Miss Baynard.

She was standing, supporting herself with one hand on the table and with the other pressed to her side. For a little space her gaze met his without the flicker of an eyelash and then dropped before the ardor of his regard. Her heart was beating tumultuously, while the quick rise and fall of her bosom told of the emotions at work beneath. A lovely flush suffused both face and throat; but Dare was paler than ordinary, and haggard and weary-looking, and might have just risen from a sick bed. Both were putting a strong restraint on themselves, but each showed it in a different way.

Nell did not advance with impulsive outstretched hands, as she had done in the case of Mr. Ellerslie. It was as though her limbs refused to move under her. But when Dare came up and held out one of his hands, she laid one of hers in it readily enough. "It did not take long to bring you here, Miss Baynard," he said, "when once you knew that my uncle had tidings of the boy."

After pressing her hand slightly he had withdrawn his own. They might have been the merest casual acquaintances, Nell felt a little bitterly. And yet, unless her feelings had blinded her, as he entered the room, she had detected in his eyes a flame of passionate ardor from which her own had been fain to shrink abashed. Could it be that he was hiding something from her, even as she was hiding something from him? As this question flashed across her she raised her eyes once more to his. But the flame which had so dazzled her a minute before

was no longer there. Had it been extinguished? or was it merely that a veil had been temporarily drawn before it?

It was after a scarcely observably pause that she answered his remark. "You may be sure that after Mr. Ellerslie's message reached me I let no grass grow under my feet. I came, looking to have merely some tidings of the boy, whereas it was Evan himself whom I found! But I am only telling you what you know already. When I began to thank your uncle, under the belief that I owed Evan's recovery to him, he stopped me. It seems that you are the person to whom my thanks are due. Believe me, Mr. Dare, they are yours from the bottom of my heart."

Dare bowed. "Not a word more on that score, I beg," he said with a smile. "I need not tell you that it makes me very happy to have been the means of restoring Evan to you; but, as you are aware, I myself have a strong interest in the boy—strong enough to make it impossible for me to leave a stone unturned till he had been found, whether by me or some one else did not greatly matter."

"I am very glad it was you, and not another, who found him."

"And, of course, I am not sorry that such should have been the case."

Miss Baynard had resumed her chair, and Dare had dropped into another no great distance away.

"If there is no secret involved in the affair, and it will be breaking no confidence on your part, I should like you to tell me, not only how you succeeded in discovering Evan's whereabouts, but by what means you contrived to rescue him from the wretches—for wretches they must have been—who, to gratify some vile purpose of their own, stole him away in broad daylight."

"Tis a story very easily told. To your old friend Captain Nightshade is due the boy's rescue from those who abducted him."

"To Captain Nightshade? Oh!"

"Who once more, and for the last time, revisited the glimpses of the moon. But I am starting my story at the



wrong end. I will tell it you from the beginning, since you say you would like to hear it. First of all, however, I must inquire into the state of Master Evan's horse, which seems to be minus one of its legs."

Miss Baynard left Rockmount two hours later, but without seeing Mr. Ellerslie again, who sent his apologies by his nephew. His rheumatism had come on in the night, and this morning he was unable to rise.

Dare rode with Miss Baynard as far as the park gates of Stanbrook, with Evan in front of him. Next day he was going to London, there to complete a few preparations and arrange certain business matters for Mr. Ellerslie, before setting sail for that New World where his home would henceforth be. But this was not to be their final farewell; they would see each other once more in about a fortnight, when Dare would come north in order to bid his uncle good-bye, on which occasion he would not fail to call at Stanbrook. He would not, of course, dream of leaving England without seeing his godson again.

And so they parted, both secretly consumed with love. Dare would not open his lips. In the first place, he was far too poor to marry; and then, to dream that, in any case, the proud and beautiful Miss Baynard would stoop so low as to wed the notorious "Captain Nightshade" was the veriest moonstruck folly. Had he but known how often Nell, with despair gnawing at her heartstrings, murmured sadly to herself, "If only he would say one word!" what a change, little less than miraculous, would have come over him!

But the word was not said, and they separated with nothing warmer than a hand-grasp—torn asunder, not by Fate, but by their own pride, and to the full as wretched as parted lovers are always said, or supposed, to be.

Lady Carradine, having much leisure time on her hands, and being fond of letter-writing, not infrequently obliged her goddaughter with one of her lengthy and somewhat diffusely-worded epistles. To Miss Baynard, in the retirement of Stanbrook, these occasional glimpses of a life

so different from her own were always welcome; and as her ladyship had now taken up her permanent residence in London and saw a good deal of company, she had much to tell that was both fresh and interesting.

Nearly a fortnight had gone by since Nell's return from Rockmount, and she was looking daily for the coming of Dare, when one of Lady Carradine's crossed and recrossed letters—postage in those days was a consideration—came to hand. With only one part of her ladyship's epistle are we in any way concerned. The part in question ran as under:—

"I forget, my dear, whether I ever mentioned to you that among my many acquaintances is numbered Sir Peter Warrendale, a baronet of old family, whose home, when he is at home, is somewhere in your benighted part of the country. Of late years, however, he has been seen a good deal in town. I have a notion that his health is not quite what he would like it to be, and that he has little or no faith in your rural practitioners, which I can't wonder at. But that is his own secret.

"He is now well on for seventy, a tetchy, cross-grained old man, with a good word for nobody behind their back; and I have not the least doubt he pulls me to pieces before others, just as he pulls others to pieces before me. I candidly confess that I don't like him, but he helps to amuse me, and to any one who does that I can forgive much.

"I had not seen him for some little time till one evening about a week ago, when he called upon me, evidently brimful of news, of which it was needful that he should relieve himself to somebody if he wished to escape a fit of apoplexy. I quite expected that I was about to be treated to the latest scandalous *on dit*, or the most recent morsel of society gossip, which would lose nothing in Sir Peter's telling, but for once I was mistaken. What he had to tell me was the particulars of a somewhat singular incident in which he had figured as one of the chief actors.

"It would appear that several months ago Sir Peter, while travelling in his own chariot, was stopped by a mounted highwayman and relieved, among other things,

of a choice snuff-box—an heirloom, and set with brilliants—by which he set great store. Although the affair happened in his own part of the country, when he came to town, a few weeks later, he reported his loss at Bow Street, and handed in a full description of the box. This he did in the faint hope that the box might some day find its way to one of the London pawnbrokers—to each of whom a description of it would have been furnished—and, through him, back to its rightful owner.

“Time went on, and Sir Peter had given up all hope of ever seeing his box again, when he was one day requested to betake himself to Bow Street, and there, sure enough, he set eyes once more on his precious heirloom. It had been found on the person of a low London thief who had been arrested for something altogether different.

“But now comes the most singular feature of the affair. The box had been *twice* stolen, once, several months ago, from the person of Sir Peter, and a second time, a few weeks ago, here in London, from the person of a certain Mr. Geoffrey Dare, and both losses had been notified to the authorities.

“Sir Peter having identified the box as his property, it became needful to ascertain through what channel it had come into the possession of Mr. Dare, who seems to be one of those numerous young men of good family about whom one is continually hearing, who seem to think that twenty thousand pounds will go as far as a hundred thousand, and who, after their follies and extravagances have made them the talk of the town for a few seasons, vanish and are no more seen. At any rate, that, some two or three years ago, the young man in question was a well-known figure in London society, and that, with the help of the gaming table—an important factor in nearly all such cases—he dissipated his fortune to the last shilling, are well ascertained facts.

“When inquired for at his lodgings—a couple of cheap rooms in some horrid back street—it was ascertained that he had gone into the country for an indefinite time, without leaving any word where he might be found. Such

being the state of affairs, nothing more could be done till he should return, which he did about ten days ago. A message had been left at his lodgings, requesting his attendance at Bow Street, which he seems to have lost no time in obeying. There he was questioned as to how the snuff-box came into his keeping, and, his answers not being deemed satisfactory, he was confronted with Sir Peter.

"In him—although he admitted that the highwayman was masked—the baronet professed to recognize the man who robbed him of his purse and the box; indeed, on being pressed, he actually went so far as to swear to his identity with the robber, although, from what he has confessed to me, I cannot help thinking that the evidence on which he grounds his accusation is of the flimsiest possible kind.

"But be that as it may, after two or three remands at Bow Street, Dare has been committed to take his trial for highway robbery at the next Lanchester assizes, within a few miles of which town Sir Peter was waylaid.

"I had written thus far yesterday when Sir Peter himself rang the bell. He brought me some further news with regard to young Dare which is of a sufficiently remarkable kind.

"It would appear that the authorities have some ground for believing that in him they have laid hands on no less a personage than a certain Captain Nightshade (a sobriquet, of course), whose exploits and adventures as a gentleman of the road in the course of the past two or three years have, according to Sir Peter, formed the fireside talk of half the households in the north of England. It seems, however, that some six or eight months ago he disappeared, and has not been heard of since. But now that the runners have been laid on the scent, 'twill not be their fault if they fail to run their quarry to earth.

"Poor fellow! I can't help feeling sorry for him, although it may be very reprehensible on my part to say so. I am afraid it will go hard with him at his trial. 'Tis said that Captain Nightshade was one of the most chivalrous of men, and never robbed a woman in his life."

## CHAPTER XXV.

## A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

LADY CARRADINE's letter, figuratively speaking, smote poor Nell, like a bolt from the blue. She had imagined several things, any one of which might have delayed Dare's coming—he had given her to understand that his business in London would not take up more than a fortnight at the most—but no faintest dread or suspicion that, after so long a time, he would be arrested and cast for trial on a charge connected with his past career had ever entered her mind. It was like a stab in the dark by an unseen hand, and she reeled under it, and felt for a while as if she were hurt in a vital part past hope of recovery.

She did not sleep a wink during the whole of the night after her receipt of the news. Now and then she lay down for a little while on a couch, but for the most part she spent the long dark hours in pacing her room restlessly from end to end. No sooner, however, had the first streak of daylight appeared in the sky than she quitted the house, and, making her way down to the banks of the little river which ran past the foot of the park, she followed its solitary windings for some miles, till it drew near the village of Moss-crags, where the early housewives were now astir, and the laborers going forth to their work; then she turned and retraced the way she had come. It had seemed to her that she could think more clearly and coherently under the free air of heaven than in the confined space of her own chamber.

All her thinking had for its intent the answering of one question: "What can I do to help him?" But so bitterly did the sense of her powerlessness weigh upon her that she could have beaten her head against the wall in a tempest of rage and impotent passion. She could do

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nothing—nothing; a month-old babe would be as competent to help him as she was. The four walls of a jail held him, and there was no door of escape open to him save that last one of all which led to the gallows. Several times in the course of the night the shadows that seem to lurk so thickly around one at such times had shaped themselves into the ghastly semblance of a cross-tree with its dangling rope, which, all imaginary though it was, had caused her soul to shudder and grow sick within her.

In the days to which our narrative refers the old barbarous and inhuman penal code was still in full operation, and crimes which a short term of imprisonment with hard labor would now expiate had the last dread sentence of the law pronounced on them without hope of reprieve. At the Lanchester spring assizes of that year, as Miss Baynard did not fail to call to mind, a couple of men had been condemned to death, one of them for sheep-stealing and the other for shop-lifting. In the eye of the law the crime for which Geoffrey Dare stood committed was of a much more heinous kind than either of those, and should the charge be proved against him, as there seemed every likelihood of its being, then would the gallows seen by Nell with the eyes of her imagination develop into a very real erection on the roof of Lanchester jail. In such a case as Dare's—whether or no they succeeded in identifying him with "Captain Nightshade"—the death penalty would indubitably be exacted. Justice would demand her victim, while Mercy wept with her face turned to the wall.

And still Nell's heart echoed persistently with the cry, "What can I do to help him?" But it was a cry which both earth and heaven flung back, and to which no answer was vouchsafed her. All that day and all the next night she was like a distracted creature, but distracted after the quiet fashion of one who craves for absolute solitude, and to whom even the society of those nearest and dearest is distasteful, if not positively unbearable.

Kind-hearted Mrs. Budd was greatly put about, being altogether at a loss to divine what was the matter with

Nell, and whether the strangeness of her manner was due to a mental or bodily cause. Never before had she developed such peculiar symptoms, for no more sane and healthy being ever existed. She had never swooned in her life, although swooning, at proper times and season, was regarded rather as a fashionable accomplishment than otherwise. She never fancied that she was ill when nothing ailed her, or pretended that she had lost her appetite; she was never troubled with qualms, or spasms, or "the vertigo"; and as for being dyspeptic, she did not know the meaning of the word. She had been rendered very anxious and unhappy by the abduction of Evan, and proportionately happy by his recovery, but there had been nothing in the way she bore herself at that time which at all resembled the peculiar and inexplicable mood of which she had been the victim for the last four-and-twenty hours.

It was in a certain measure due to Mrs. Budd's instinctive tact, which taught her when it was advisable to speak and when to keep silent, that she and Miss Baynard had got on so well together. On the present occasion her instinct told her that Nell was in no mood to bear questioning, and she kept a guard on her tongue accordingly. But by the afternoon of the second day her uneasiness had grown to such an extent that she felt she should be lacking in her duty to one so much younger than herself if she refrained any longer from endeavoring to discover what it was that had changed Miss Baynard so unaccountably in so short a space of time.

"My dear Elinor, what is it that ails you? Whatever is the matter with you?" she at length summoned up courage to ask. "You are not like the same girl that you were at breakfast-time yesterday."

"Am I not? And yet I am the same," replied Nell with a smile which had more of tears than mirth in it. "What is't that ails me, do you ask! Nothing more serious than a fit of the megrims, I assure you. But I am apt to be dangerous at such times. You had better not come too near me; I might grow worse and bite you."

Then, before the astonished lady had time to collect

her faculties, she found herself hugged and kissed, and left alone. Half a minute later she heard Miss Baynard singing as she went upstairs to her room. Then a door clashed somewhere in the distance, and all was still.

Some time in the dead of night Nell lay down on the couch in her bedroom, and presently sank into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion. In that sleep she had a very vivid dream, from which, at the end of a couple of hours, she suddenly awoke. So strongly had the particulars of her dream impressed themselves upon her that she lay for another hour without stirring, turning them over and over in her mind till she had mastered every detail of the scheme which, as she firmly believed, had been revealed to her by some supernatural influence in her sleep.

She had scarcely eaten a mouthful of anything since her receipt of her godmother's letter, but this morning she appeared at the breakfast-table as usual, and looking as if the last two days had been blotted out of her existence. She was still a little pale, and dark round the eyes, but the eyes themselves had lost that look of almost fierce despair, as of a creature driven to bay and not knowing which way to turn, which had been their dominant expression for the last eight-and-forty hours. Now they shone with a serene and steadfast lustre, which yet had in it a something of fixed resolution, as if bent on carrying out some hidden purpose, which the busy brain behind was brooding remotely over, even while its outward attention was occupied and given with seeming abandonment to far other things.

Mrs. Budd saw and was satisfied, and was far too wise to put any further questions with reference to a state of affairs which was so evidently over and done with.

Nell followed Mrs. Budd's lead over breakfast-table-talk wherever that good lady chose to let it wander, and her divagations were many and various. She seemed in the best of spirits, and when the meal was over she indulged herself and Evan with a wild romp.

The boy had been much put about in his childish way because for the last two nights he had been banished from



his Aunt Nell's chamber to that of Mrs. Budd (in those first days after his recovery Nell would not entrust him at night to the care of any of the servants), but this glorious romp made amends for everything.

After that Nell disappeared for some hours, and was engaged upstairs in her own rooms ; but she joined Mrs. Budd and Evan at dinner, and in the afternoon they all drove out together and watched the sunset from the summit of Goat Scar. Then followed a long and happy evening. Never had Mrs. Budd seen the girl more seemingly merry and light-hearted than she was that day ; she and the Nell of the day before were two different beings. And yet at times there would come a pause in her gayety, and for a few seconds the light in her eyes would deepen and darken, and a look would come into them as if something had suddenly crossed her vision, seen by herself alone. But, whatever it might be, it went as quickly as it had come, and with one sharp-drawn breath she was herself again.

Next day at breakfast her mood was unaltered ; but again, in the course of the forenoon, she was invisible for a couple of hours. That there was some secret business afoot Mrs. Budd felt satisfied, but, being the most discreet of matrons, she would rather have tied a handkerchief over her eyes than have allowed them to see what it was evidently not intended they should see. Still, it was not without a little shock of surprise that she heard the news which Nell broke abruptly to her as soon as their two o'clock dinner had come to an end.

"I am about to leave you for a little while," said the girl, smiling bravely. "At present I can tell you neither the object of my journey nor my destination, but that you will know everything in good time I do not doubt. Neither can I fix the date of my return, because that is a point about which I am not quite clear. I leave Evan in your hands with every confidence. That you will look well after him I feel assured. He loves you and will be happy with you."

After this followed a few directions with regard to

household and other matters; then Miss Baynard went to get ready for her journey.

An hour later Mrs. Budd and Evan were waiting on the steps of the main entrance to see her start. Presently, mounted on her mare Peggy, and followed by John Dyce, also on horseback, she came riding round from the stables, and a very fair and gracious picture she made in her long dark-blue riding habit, over which she wore a short gray cloak lined with black and tied with black ribbons, being in mourning for Mr. Cortelyon. Her hat was of black beaver, broad-brimmed and ornamented with two sweeping ostrich plumes of the same color.

The afternoon sun, shining upon three or four heavy ringlets of chestnut hair which had escaped from under her hat, made a golden glory of them. The late pallor of her complexion had given place to a lovely flush of color. Her eyes, while more than ordinarily brilliant, did not smile as her lips did; rather did it seem as if they were charged with the light of some great resolution which might need all her courage to carry it through.

Evan was held aloft for the sake of a last kiss. There was a fervent "Heaven keep you, darling!" a flickering smile, the glisten of a tear, a last wave of the hand, and Nell was gone. The widow and child stood hand in hand till the trees of the avenue hid her from view and the sound of hoofbeats had died into silence. Then they went back indoors, but for both the light and gladness of the house had vanished. There was a chill upon everything, their spirits included.

An hour-and-a-half's good riding brought Miss Baynard and her escort to the quaint old town of Lanchester, with its narrow streets and narrower alleyways, with its many overhanging, lopsided houses, and its grim old county jail, built of ragged graystone, which frowns blankly down from the upper end of its wide, irregularly-shaped market-place, as if in mute warning to all and sundry. Miss Baynard, whose road led her past one corner of it, shuddered involuntarily as she glanced at it

out of a corner of her eye. For her just then that gray old pile was the most vitally interesting spot in the whole world.

She was bound, first of all, for Langrig, the seat of Sir James Dalrymple, which was situated in the suburbs of Lanchester. Sir James, it may be remembered, was one of the trustees appointed under Mr. Cortelyon's unsigned will, and very glad he was, when he came to learn the contents of that document, to find that it was so much waste paper, and that he would not be called upon to help in the carrying out of what he regarded as its most wicked and unjust provisions. He had a warm regard for Nell, not only for her own sake, but for that of her father, whom he had known and liked, and with whom he had spent many a roystering evening when they were young blades together about London town. Finally, it may be mentioned that Sir James was chairman of the Lanchester bench of magistrates.

"I have come to you, Sir James, on rather a singular errand," began Miss Baynard, when she had been shown into the library, where she found the baronet sitting with one leg in a gout-rest, and after the usual greetings had passed between them.

"My dear young lady, my humble services are at your command in any and every way."

"At the present time there is a certain prisoner, Mr. Geoffrey Dare by name, in Lanchester jail, awaiting his trial at the next assizes."

"Which open in three weeks from now. To be sure—to be sure. The rascal who is said to have waylaid Sir Peter Warrendale and robbed him of his watch and snuff-box, and who is shrewdly suspected of being none other than the notorious Captain Nightshade. But what about him?"

"Merely this, Sir James, that I want you to give me an order of admission—I know you have ample power to do so—to see him privately in prison. When I say privately in prison, I of course mean without witnesses."

Sir James gave vent to a low whistle. "My dear

Miss Baynard, do you know that this is really a somewhat extraordinary request of yours?"

"I am quite aware of it. But let me explain why I have preferred it." She drew a long breath. Without she was prepared to tell a lie—nay, more than one—she felt sure that her request would run the risk of a refusal. Lies to her had ever been an abomination, but the aim she had set before herself was such as to leave her no option in the matter. When a man's life is at stake, and that the life of the person you love best in the world, the ordinary rules of conduct are apt to get mixed and blurred, and much may be forgiven. In such extreme cases black is liable to be regarded as white, and white as any color you please.

Miss Baynard had come prepared to answer objections, and she went on after a hardly observable pause.

"The fact of the matter is, Sir James, that Mr. Dare, in his more prosperous days, was the bosom friend of my late cousin, Dick Cortelyon, whose young son, as you are aware, has just inherited his grandfather's property. Well, it so happens that a couple of days ago, in turning over some letters and other effects which had belonged to my cousin, I came across a sort of rough diary which had been kept by him during the last year of his life. In it there is a passage in which he makes mention of a batch of rather important family papers which, after he had fallen into disgrace at home, he had entrusted to the keeping of Mr. Dare. Now, although I have sought for them high and low, I have failed to find any trace of the papers in question, and am consequently most anxious to ascertain from Mr. Dare what has become of them; indeed, I think it most likely that they are still somewhere in his keeping. Such is my reason, Sir James, for desiring an interview with him. If it could be arranged for to-day I should esteem it a great favor, as some very special business will take me from home to-morrow, and the date of my return is altogether uncertain."

"My dear Miss Baynard, not a word more is needed. I will at once write and give you a note, addressed to

Captain Jeffs, the governor of the jail, authorizing him to permit you to have a private interview with the prisoner Dare. What a pity, what a damnable pity it is (begging your pardon) that a young fellow with good family and with the brilliant prospects which, I am given to understand, were once his, should have brought his kettle of fish to such a market as he seems to have done! But, as we make our bed, so must we lie on it. And now—— But, dear me! dear me! here am I running on without ever thinking to ask you what you will take in the way of refreshment. That's one of the fruits of being an old bachelor, and of having no womenfolk to keep me up to the mark and teach me not to forget the minor courtesies of life."

In the result, Nell agreed to accept a glass of the baronet's "particular old Madeira" and a biscuit. Not to have done as much as that would have been to infringe the unwritten laws of north-country hospitality.

Then said Sir James: "I had Lawyer Piljoy here t'other day. His purpose in coming was to tell me all about the lost child and its recovery, and a most amazing story it is; and, further, to consult with me as to what steps, if any, it is advisable to take in the affair. The first thing I did was to send for Staniforth, who was to have been your uncle's other trustee, and then we three laid our heads together. I need not bother you with reciting any of our arguments pro and con, but in the end we agreed that it would not, for various reasons, be advisable that any further proceedings should be taken in the matter. The child has been restored, which is the main thing to be borne in mind, and we felt pretty sure that no attempt would be made to abduct him a second time."

"You say, Sir James, that the child has been restored, which is quite true, but do you know whom we have to thank for it?"

"Haven't the remotest notion. I asked Piljoy how it came about, but he couldn't tell me. He said that if anybody knew, you did, but that beyond telling him it was the Honorable Mrs. B. who had abducted the youngster

(what a she-cat that woman must be!) you had favored him with no particulars."

"It is to Mr. Geoffrey Dare, now a prisoner in Lanchester jail, that the child's recovery is due. It had been arranged that he—the boy—should be secretly transported to America, where we should never have heard of him more, when Mr. Dare, having discovered what was afoot, in the guise of a highwayman stopped the carriage in which he was being carried off, and rescued him from the wretches to whose charge he had been committed."

"Never heard of such a thing in my life, damme if I did! Um—um! I crave your pardon, my dear, but strong feelings have a way of finding their vent in strong language. And young Dare did that, did he?" Well, well, we must see what can be done for him when his trial comes on. Such stuff as he seems made of is too good for the gallows. And now I will write you the promised note. I'm afraid you'll be a little later than the regulation hour for seeing prisoners, but maybe Jeffs will strain a point for once in a way. At any rate, I'll ask him to do so."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

“FOR MY SAKE.”

THE late September afternoon was closing rapidly in when John Dyce helped his mistress to alight from her mare, which had been reined up close to the great, black, bolt-studded gates of Lanchester jail. It was a rare thing for those gates to be opened except for the admission of prisoners, the usual means of entrance and exit being by a postern in the wall no great distance away.

On this door Miss Baynard now proceeded to give three resounding blows with the huge iron knocker. Half a minute later a small wicket was opened, and a hirsute face peered out into the glowing darkness.

“Be good enough to have this note given to Captain Jeffs without a minute’s delay,” said Miss Baynard in her clear, imperious tones. “It is of the utmost importance. I will wait here while you obtain an answer.” With that she handed in Sir James’s note at the wicket, but on the top of it lay a shining guinea.

There was a grunt, and the wicket was shut.

While awaiting an answer, Nell drew from one of her pockets a long diaphanous black veil, which she proceeded to fix round the brim of her hat and to fasten in a knot behind in such a fashion that it came halfway down her face, leaving nothing of it exposed save her upper lip, her mouth, and her chin.

The wait seemed an intolerably long one, and her nerve was beginning to give way a little, when the wicket was opened for the second time, and the same hirsute face made its appearance. “The governor says it’s beyond the hour for visitors, and that ye should have come earlier; but as ye’re a friend o’ Sir James Dalrymple’s

he'll admit ye. He sends word that he's sorry not to come and speak to ye hisself, but he's got company at dinner, and can't leave th' table." Such, in the gruffest of tones, was the doorkeeper's welcome message.

Then the wicket was closed again, and half a minute later the narrow black door had opened to admit Nell. She slipped in like a shadow, the postern was shut with a clash, and she found herself in a bare, flagged ante-room or entrance-hall, with three or four doors opening out of it, and dimly lighted with a couple of guttering candles. Here was a second man, like the first, in uniform, who carried in one hand a jingling bunch of keys, and to whom the doorkeeper introduced her with the remark, "This is Willyam, mum, who will show ye the way if ye will please to follow him."

"Then perhaps William will oblige me by accepting this trifle," said Miss Baynard; and before the turnkey knew what had happened there was a guinea nestling in his palm.

Then from some mysterious pocket Miss Baynard produced a large, flat bottle containing a quart of the most potent brandy in the Stanbrook cellars. "And here is something to share between you and to drink my health in," she added, as she proffered the bottle for the doorkeeper's acceptance, who took it as tenderly as if it had been a month-old baby.

"Eh, mum, but it's agen the rules to accept anything o' this sort," he remarked, with a wag of his head. "We'll not engage to drink it. No, no. Rules isn't made in order that they may be broke. We'll just hide it away where nobody but ourselves can find it, so as not to put temptation in the way of any other poor body." And with that the rascal favored his fellow-officer with a portentous wink.

The latter functionary now lighted a small lantern, and, having unlocked one of the inner doors, he said, "If you will be pleased to follow me, mum."

By this time Nell's nerves were worked up to a point of tension that was almost unendurable. She set her



teeth hard and clenched her hands as if she intended never to open them again.

Success had attended her so far; would it desert her now? What she had already achieved was as nothing in comparison with that which was still before her. For a few moments it seemed as if the courage which had hitherto sustained her were about to give way.

As she followed the man she had merely a vague impression of a gloomy, flagged, earth-smelling corridor, lighted only by the turnkey's lantern; of a heavy iron door which had to be unlocked to allow of their further advance; of another corridor the counterpart of the first, save that on one side of it some half-dozen doors were ranged at intervals. At one of these her conductor came to a halt, and, having selected a key from his bunch, proceeded to unlock it. Then, flinging wide the door, he said in deep, gruff tones which seemed to fill the corridor, "Prisoner, a lady to see you," and with that he moved aside to allow Miss Baynard to enter.

At the words Dare sprang to his feet. He had been reading, stretched at full length on the pallet which served him for a bed by night and a couch by day. A wooden sconce, fixed against the wall, held a solitary candle of the coarsest tallow, which diffused a dim, sickly light through the cell. It was an indulgence his own pocket had to pay for. Had not the volume on which he was engaged been in large print he could not have seen to read it.

At sight of him all Nell's failing courage came back to her with a rush, mingled with a great wave of love and compassion. Hardly could she command her voice while she whispered to the turnkey, "Leave us for half-an-hour; don't come before."

"All right, mum," whispered the man back.

Then Nell stepped across the threshold of the cell, and the door was locked behind her. Dare, his book fallen unheeded to the floor, stood staring at her with wide-lidded eyes as though she were some visitant from the tomb. Nell responded to his amazement with a strangely-

wistful smile, and eyes that no longer strove to hide a secret which, she flattered herself, they had never revealed before. She could not have spoken at that moment to save her life. She felt as if a spell were upon her; everything about her was unreal. Dare himself was not a creature of flesh and blood, but merely a projection of her own imagination. Some sorceress had thrown an enchantment over her which——

"Is it you, Miss Baynard, whom I see? and here, of all places in the universe!"

Dare's voice broke the spell that was upon her, and recalled to her, as in a flash, the very real business—the matter of life and death—which had taken her there, and which must be entered on without a minute's unnecessary delay.

"Yes, it is I, Mr. Dare," she answered in accents that were slightly tremulous. "You did me and mine a great, nay, an inestimable service; and I am here to see whether I cannot do something for you in return."

A bitter smile lit up his sallow features for a moment. "It is indeed good of you to have put yourself to so much trouble about such a worthless wretch as I. But, were I a hundred-fold more worthy than I am, neither you, Miss Baynard, nor any power on earth (save and except the King's clemency, which is altogether out of the question) could do aught to help me out of the coil of trouble which I have brought upon myself."

"Do not be too sure on that point, Mr. Dare. It is the humblest instruments which sometimes avail for the most difficult tasks. We have all read the fable of the lion and the mouse, and cases might arise in which even such an inconsiderable person as I, owing to my very insignificance might be able to do things which would be impossible in any one of greater importance." Her voice was firm enough by now, and her eyes confronted his unwaveringly. She had pushed up her veil till only an edge of it was visible across her forehead at the moment the turnkey had locked the door behind her.

Dare bowed, but looked slightly puzzled. To what was

all this the prelude? That she had not come there without having some very special purpose in view he could no longer doubt. But merely to see her face again was to him what the sight of water is to some poor wretch dying of thirst in the desert. To himself he always spoke of her as the Lady of his Dreams.

"Will you not be seated, Miss Baynard?" he now said, as he brought forward a substantial three-legged stool, the only thing, except his pallet, he had to sit on. "My accommodation is of the simplest, as you can see for yourself. That, however, is not my fault, but an oversight (shall we call it?) on the part of my custodians, whose affection for me is so extreme that they cannot bear to part from me."

So Nell sat down on the three-legged stool, while Dare stood a little apart, with folded arms, resting a shoulder against the whitewashed wall of his cell.

Miss Baynard cleared her voice; the crucial moment had come at last.

"I am not here this evening, Mr. Dare, merely to sympathize with you," she resumed, "although that my most heartfelt sympathy is yours needs no assurance on my part, but to put before you a certain definite proposition, which has been carefully thought out in all its details, and the carrying out of which seems to me perfectly feasible. Here, in the fewest words possible—necessarily few because half an hour at the outside must bring my visit to an end—is my proposition. It is simply that you and I shall change places. In half a hour from now you shall quit this cell in the guise of Elinor Baynard, and I shall stay where I am, having, for the nonce, exchanged my personality for that of Mr. Geoffrey Dare.

Dare had sprung to "attention" long before Nell had come to an end. A wave of dark crimson swept across his lean face, leaving it sallow than before. His eyes lighted up with an intense glow. Would any woman, he asked himself, any woman who was young and beautiful, put such a proposition to a man if she did not love him? It was a question he did not wait to

answer. He would have time enough to consider it later on.

"Never had an undeserving man a more noble offer made him than you have just made me. But, putting aside the insuperable difficulties in the way of carrying it out, there are other reasons which——"

"There are no insuperable difficulties in the way of carrying it out," broke in Nell. "Every arrangement has been made, as you shall presently hear. But remember this, that we have no time to waste in explanations or idle objections."

Dare bowed as accepting a correction. "'Then permit me to say as briefly as may be, Miss Baynard, that it cannot be, that on no account whatever could I, or would I accept such a sacrifice at your hands."

"A sacrifice! Oh, the mockery of the phrase!" Although she spoke aloud, the words seemed addressed to herself rather than to Dare. She had removed her riding gloves, and the long, slender fingers of one hand now gripped those of the other convulsively. Her sharp, white teeth bit into her under-lip and left their mark there. She seemed to be bracing herself for a final effort.

"You are no doubt aware," she resumed, "that your trial will come on in about three weeks from now."

"That is a circumstance I am not likely to forget."

"And have you considered, have you allowed your imagination to paint for you what the consequence will be should the verdict at your trial go against you?"

"As, considering the evidence which will be brought against me, it is nearly sure to do. Yes, I have fully considered the consequence, and may be said to be on pretty familiar terms with it by this time. But as for my imagination, I trust it is too well-bred to allow itself to dwell unnecessarily on details which are best kept in the background till the latest possible moment."

"And the prospect does not appall you?"

"Appall me? No. 'Tis not a pleasant one, I admit. But what would you? I played a game with Fate, the dice went against me, and I have lost. That, however, is

no reason why I should bewail myself like a puling child, or why my cheek should blanch at the prospect which I shall presently be called upon to confront."

"But will you not see, cannot you comprehend, that a door of escape is open for you?" Her voice had in it a ring of almost passionate impatience. The precious minutes were drifting away one by one.

"Possibly so, but only at an expense which I do not choose to incur."

"Oh, what headstrong folly! Did the world ever see its like? And you would rather face your—your doom than accept this sacrifice, as you choose to call it, at my hands?"

"Even so. I have said it, and nothing will avail to move me from it."

For a moment or two she beat her hands together in an agony of helplessness. Then she stood up. Her face was colorless, and her forehead contracted as if with a spasm of intense pain.

"You do not know how cruel you are," she said in low, concentrated tones. "You drag from me things which I thought never to reveal to a living soul." She paused for a space of half-a-dozen heart-beats, as though fighting against some hidden emotion. Then she went on. "Should it be your fate to die, Geoffrey Dare, the same day that ends your life shall end mine! I swear it." She lifted up her hands and let her face sink into them.

An inarticulate cry broke from Dare, a great light leapt into his eyes, he drew a step nearer and held out both his arms. Then he half drew back, with his arms extended in mid-air. "Such words, unless I am a bad interpreter, can have but one meaning." He seemed to breathe the syllables rather than to speak them.

For a few seconds there was no reply, and when it did come he had to strain his ears or he would have lost it:

"Your death-day shall be mine. I have said it. Is not that enough?"

A moment later his arms were about her, and he was

straining her passionately to his heart. "And you love me!—me!!" he ejaculated. "Oh, miracle of miracles!"

Sweet to him as a breath from Paradise was the whispered answer: "I have loved you ever since the night you were so kind to Jack Prentice."

It was three minutes later. With what passed in the interim we are in no way concerned.

"But consider, my darling, think and consider before it is too late," urged Dare. "That Miss Baynard of Stanbrook should stoop to love Captain Nightshade—a highwayman—a minion of the moon! No, it must not be! And I—I should be a scoundrel to accept so great a gift, unless——"

A hand was laid on his lips. "Oh, hush! I will not listen to such words. You steal away a poor girl's heart, and then you bid her think and consider! Too late, too late. But never, never will I forgive you for having wrung my secret from me! Yet, what am I saying? On one condition I will forgive you fully and freely."

"And that is——?"

"That without a word more of demur you do your share in helping me to carry out the scheme which brought me here. What that scheme is I have already told you."

"But, my dearest——"

For the second time a hand was laid on his lips. "Not a word! I will not listen. You will do it, if not for your own sake, then for mine. Do you hear? For mine."

"For yours, then, let it be," he assented, but for the life of him he could not see by what means she purposed carrying out her extraordinary proposition.

The prison clock began to boom the hour. Miss Baynard started. "Heavens! Our little slice of time more than half gone, and nothing done!"

Then, without a word more, she untied her short gray cloak and laid it aside. Under it she had on a loosely fitting bodice and her long riding skirt, both of which garments a couple a minutes later lay in a heap on the floor; and then to Dare's astonished eyes there stood re-

vealed the seeming figure of a young man, wearing a ruffled shirt and cravat, a pair of dark small clothes and Hessian boots—all at one time the property of unfortunate Dick Cortelyon. Only the plumed hat, the veil, and the heavy chestnut curls still remained to bespeak their owner's sex. But Nell's hands went quickly up to her head, there were a few deft movements of her fingers, and the whole paraphernalia—hat, veil, and ringlets—came bodily away. Well might Dare's eyes open themselves still wider. Before leaving home she had shorn off her wealth of tresses, and then, by means of some feminine sleight-of-hand, had contrived to secure them to the inner side of her hat in such a way that when the hat was worn the curls lay in quite natural fashion round the nape of the neck.

Nor was Dare's wonder yet to end. From a pocket in her small-clothes Nell now drew forth a black wig, a masquerade relic of poor Dick's, and proceeded to draw it on over her close-cropped chestnut locks. Then turning to her companion, who had been regarding her all this time without a word, she said in mock-serious tones, "Your coat and vest, sir, or your life!"

At once Dare divested himself of the articles in question, and when Nell had inducted herself into them her transformation was complete, and a very dashing and debonair young buck she looked.

"And now it is high time for Miss Baynard to make *her* toilet," she remarked; "but such an awkward young woman is she that it may be as well I should lend her a helping hand."

Dare, who recognized the futility of any further opposition, yielded himself into her hands and did exactly as she bade him. Although Nell was tall, he was three inches taller than she, but the riding skirt admitted of ample allowance for the difference. When, however, it came to the bodice, that garment cracked ominously, and the hooks and eyes wholly refused to come together. But, happily, the gray cloak was ample enough to hide all shortcomings.



"Your coat and vest, sir—or your life."

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Lastly, the elaborate headdress—hat, veil, and curls—had to be adjusted. This was a matter of some nicety, but presently it was accomplished to Miss Baynard's satisfaction. Then, stepping back a pace, she took a general survey of her handiwork. "Yes, I think you'll do," she said, "although you do look so preternaturally tall. On no account must you either speak or cough, and do for goodness' sake try to mitigate that seven-league stride of yours. I suppose that, try as you might, you couldn't mince or bridle a little, as all young ladies are supposed to do?"

Although she spoke with such seeming levity, her nerves were all a-tingle with mingled apprehension and excitement. She felt as if she were strapped down on the operating table, and waiting for the coming of the surgeon with his terrible knife.

The only remark made by Dare during the process of his transformation was when Nell was on the point of crowning him with the hat and curls. With a caressing touch on one of the tresses, he said: "Oh, my dear one, to think you should have done this for me! What a sacrifice! Can I ever forgive you?"

"Of course you can," she answered lightly. "Am I not making you a present of the rubbish, to do what you like with? Some lovers think themselves well off if they can secure a tiny tress of their mistress' hair, but so great is *my* generosity that I freely present you with enough to stuff a sofa cushion."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

But now was heard a faint sound as of the unlocking and opening of a door in the distance, and then, heralded by a cough, the noise of approaching footsteps on the flagged floor of the corridor. Instead of a bare thirty minutes, our young people had been nearly an hour together. Whether the guineas and the brandy were in any way concerned with such a liberal measurement of time is more than one would undertake to decide.

"The time to part has come," said Nell in a hurried whisper. "Listen. My man John Dyce is waiting out-

side, in charge of my mare. He may be trusted implicitly. He has had his instructions, and will ask no questions. The future I leave wholly in your hands."

More was impossible. The turnkey was at the door. After a preliminary rap on it, he called out, "Time's up long since, mum. Are you ready?"

"Quite ready, William, thank you," was Miss Baynard's clear response.

So William unlocked the door, and drew it back on its hinges. What he saw when he had done so was his prisoner, as it seemed to him, seated on his pallet in a dejected attitude, with bowed head, and his elbows resting on his knees; nor did he so much as look up at the opening of the door.

Just inside, waiting apparently for the opening of the door, and with her back to the candle, was the young lady visitor, whose face was now wholly hidden by her veil. As soon as the door was opened she passed out without a word, and then stood aside for a moment, while it was shut and relocked. That done, William, swinging his hand-lantern, and not, it must sorrowfully be confessed, quite so steady on his feet as he had been earlier in the evening, led the way, in happy ignorance of the peck of trouble he was brewing for himself.

Hardly was the cell door shut before Nell was kneeling by it with one ear pressed to its cold iron surface. The footsteps died into silence, then as before, was heard the clash of a distant door, and after that all was still with a stillness as of the tomb.

Then Nell stood up, a great calm, a great happiness almost, shining out of her eyes. "If only I have succeeded in saving him," she said aloud, "nothing else matters!"

But next moment her overwrought nerves gave way. Staggering across the floor and flinging herself face downward on the pallet, she burst into a tempest of tears.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THREE YEARS AFTER.

*From Mrs. Dare to Lady Carradine.*

"MY DEAR GODMOTHER,—Your last letter, to hand five days ago, brought me a large measure of happiness. In it you tell me that you have at length forgiven me in full for what heretofore you have always designated as my 'rash and ill-considered marriage.' It does indeed make me glad to learn that I am once more to be taken back, fully and freely, into your affections, the loss of which has been the bitterest drop in the cup of my married felicity.

"In your letter you put several questions to me having reference to the events of the last few weeks prior to my departure from England. These I will now endeavor to answer to the best of my ability.

"Thanks to the interest brought to bear by your ladyship in a certain high quarter, your scapegrace god-daughter, after having made three appearances before the Lanchester bench of magistrates, was unceremoniously set at liberty. This, of course, is ancient history to you, but it is the point from which, for your information, I purpose narrating as briefly as may be what befell me afterwards up to the date of my departure for America.

"I had only been a couple of days back at Stanbrook when a note reached me which had been brought by a man on horseback. The writer of it was Mr. Cope-Ellerslie, of Rockmount, whose acquaintance I had made some time before under rather peculiar circumstances, asking me to go back with his messenger, as the writer had some news of importance to communicate. This I had no hesitation about doing, seeing that Mr. Ellerslie was known to me as the uncle of Geoffrey Dare.

"A couple of hours later I alighted from my mare at the door of Rockmount.

"A man between sixty and seventy, tall and bowed, habited in a monkish robe, with a moustache and a short peaked beard, long grizzled hair parted down the middle, and a singular waxen pallor of complexion—such was the Mr. Ellerslie known to me, and such was the man who now received me. I had assumed that it was in order to be favored with some tidings of, or to receive some message from, his nephew (who had been utterly lost to me from the moment the cell door was shut between us), that I had been summoned to Rockmount. Nor was I mistaken.

"After having referred to the Lanchester affair in terms which I would not recapitulate even if I could, Mr. Ellerslie went on to mark that his nephew had not yet left the country, but was in safe hiding no great distance away. Proceeding, he went on to observe that he was the bearer of a certain message from Geoffrey, but that he found himself somewhat at a loss for terms in which to convey it. Stripped, however, of all verbiage it came to this: Geoffrey would not hold me to my word or promise, given him in the cell at Lanchester, if, since then, and after further consideration, I in the slightest degree regretted, or wished, to recall, anything which had passed between us on that occasion.

"Then, before I had time to frame into words the answer which leapt from my heart, Mr. Ellerslie proceeded to address me on his own account. I was young and parentless, he remarked, and, so far as he could judge, somewhat liable to be led away by generous but undisciplined impulses. He begged of me to pause, to reflect coolly and dispassionately, before linking my lot with that of a man who, should no worse fate befall him, must henceforth be an outcast from his native land. And so on, and so on, till I begged of him to cease.

"Need I tell you, my dear godmother, in what terms I answered him? No, I am sure I need not. You know your Nelly too well not to have guessed already.

"The pith of all I had to say was comprised in less than a score words: 'Geoffrey Dare is my chosen husband, and, come weal or woe, I will wed none but him.'

"Mr. Ellerslie threw up his hands. 'If you will persist, my dear young lady, in your headstrong course, then have I nothing more to urge. My ambassadorial functions are at an end, and the sooner my nephew comes and does his own talking the better for all concerned.'

"Without a word more he rose and left the room, and five minutes later Geoffrey entered it.

"To relate what passed between him and me would not entertain you in the least. It will be enough to state that if we had not been betrothed lovers before, we became so from that hour.

"It was to Rockmount that Geoffrey had directed his steps on the night of his escape, and there he had been in hiding ever since.

"When the time had come for me to take my departure in order that I might get back to Stanbrook before dark, I said to him, 'But shall I not see Mr. Ellerslie again before I go?'

"'That you certainly will not,' he replied with one of his puzzling smiles. 'Mr. Cope-Ellerslie is no longer in existence. He died about an hour ago. His life was brief but necessary. Peace to his remains!' Then, seeing my look of amazement, he added, 'Have you not yet found out, or even suspected, that Mr. Ellerslie and Geoffrey Dare were one and the same person?'

"No, that I certainly had not. Nevertheless, I was now assured that such was the fact, and I had to delay my departure for another half hour while the mystery was cleared up for me.

"When Geoffrey Dare left London a ruined man, bankrupt in love, in friendship, in means (I long ago explained to you under what peculiar circumstances he was induced to take to the King's highway), he came to Rockmount, which was his own property, and which, owing doubtless to its isolated situation in the midst of a wide stretch of desolate moorland, had been untenanted for years. With

him he brought three old family servants, whom not even the rack or the thumbscrew would have forced into betraying him. But it was Mr. Cope-Ellerslie, the scholar and the recluse, who had become the tenant of Rockmount, and no faintest suspicion ever got abroad that there was, or could be, any connection between him and Captain Nightshade.

"So far so good ; but I still failed to comprehend the nature of a disguise which so completely changed Geoffrey's identity that only an hour before my eyes had failed to penetrate it. To take one point alone: in Mr. Ellerslie's face, leaving out of account the difference in the complexions, there had been a thousand fine lines and creases, whereas in Geoffrey's it would have puzzled one to find a dozen.

"Then was I enlightened. Mr. Cope-Ellerslie's face was a mask, of which moustache, beard, eyebrows, and hair formed component parts. The foundation of the mask consisted of the skin of a newly-born kid, pared or scraped to an exceeding fineness, and moulded to the features while still plastic. Geoffrey had brought it with him from Italy several years before, where such disguises seem to be not unknown, and where it had been made for him in order that he might take part in a certain carnival frolic. So simple sometimes is the explanation of an apparently inscrutable mystery!

"But my letter is dragging itself out to an unconscionable length, and I must hurry on.

"Of a certain quiet wedding in Holland, and of the after-sailing of the two people concerned for the United States, I have no particulars worth recounting beyond those already known to you. Here they have lived happily ever since, and here—whatever home-sickness they may have felt in secret—they had made up their minds to pass the rest of their days, when a passage in your last letter set their hearts dancing with a happiness so unlooked-for that since it burst into their life like a flash of sunlight they have hardly been able to talk about anything else.

"You write, my dear godmother, that you have fair hopes of being able, by and by, through bringing your influence to bear in the same all-powerful quarter in which you brought it to bear once before, to secure for Geoffrey a free pardon. What two happy and grateful beings you would, in that case, make of my husband and me, I should fail to tell you in any words.

"You are kind enough to say, further, that you miss your Nelly's face and long to see it again, as also that there is a big corner for her in your will. We will say nothing about the latter, but, as regards the former, let me whisper in your ear that you need not be very much surprised if you see me in London in the course of next season. If Geoffrey should be free to come with me, what happiness that would be! But, in any case, I think you may look forward pretty confidently to seeing your vagrant goddaughter.

"You will readily believe me when I tell you that I am also very desirous of setting eyes again on my young kinsman, Evan Cortelyon, the account of whose abduction and recovery had for you such a special interest. (Don't forget, please, that his recovery was wholly due to my dear husband.) He has been made a ward in Chancery, and although I have frequent news of him, and am assured that he is well and happy, yet that is not like seeing him and feeling his dear arms about my neck.

"What you had to tell me in your last letter anent the Hon. Mrs. Bullivant took me by surprise, as you said it would; but I'm afraid my disposition is not of a sufficiently forgiving kind to allow of my stating, with any regard for truth, that I feel sorry for her, because I certainly do nothing of the kind.

"My surprise arises from the fact that she—of all women I have ever known the most unlikely—should have allowed herself to be so thoroughly hoodwinked as she seems to have been over her marriage with the Earl of Mortlake. Of course she was dazzled by the prospect of becoming a countess, and by the likelihood—you say she regarded it as a certainty—that in less than a twelve-



month she would be left a widow (a titled widow with a handsome jointure), such a mere wreck of humanity was his lordship, to all seeming, when she accepted him, besides being more than double her age.

"If this latter consideration was—and you appear to have no doubt on the point—her chief reason for becoming his wife, then, indeed, must her awakening have been anything but a pleasant one when she found that the man who had been carried into the church by four of his tenants, so feeble did he seem, was able, as soon as the ceremony was over, not merely to walk unassisted out of the sacred edifice, but to offer his bride the support of his arm. What a genuine comedy scene it must have been for everybody there, save and except her newly-made ladyship!

"And now you tell me that his lordship is likely to live for a dozen years to come. I know that he has been married twice before, and that he has the reputation of being one of the most brutal and unfeeling of husbands, a reputation with which it is hard to believe his present wife can have been unacquainted.

"Yes, on consideration I think I can afford to forget bygones, and to spare a little pity for my lady countess. Hers is indeed an unhappy fate; nor will she derive much consolation from the knowledge that she owes it wholly to herself.

"I have kept a very singular bit of news till the last.

"You may remember that when we came here we brought with us the dumb man, Andry Luce, who had been my Uncle Cortelyon's secretary and factotum, and about whom you have often heard me speak. Notwithstanding his infirmity, Geoffrey found him very useful in keeping the books and accounts of the large property of which my husband has the management. He was deeply attached to me, and I had a very warm regard for him.

"Well, I am grieved to have to relate that the poor fellow has come to a sad end. About a fortnight ago he was fatally injured while trying to stop a runaway horse and vehicle. Some days passed before he succumbed to

his injuries, and it was while he lay dying (I am thankful to say he did not suffer much) that he confessed something to me which perhaps I might otherwise have gone to the grave without knowing.

"You and I, my dear godmother, in days gone by, more than once bewildered our brains in trying to solve the mystery of my uncle's unsigned will, for if he had not believed it to be signed, why should he have been so anxious in his last moments, as he certainly was, to have it destroyed?"

"This was the puzzle which Andry's confession—spelled out to me word by word on his fingers after the manner of dumb people—solved once for all.

"Andry was in the habit of dabbling in chemicals in his spare moments, and it was with a chemically prepared ink, manufactured by him specially for the purpose, that the will was signed by the testator and the witnesses. The special property of the ink in question was that, within forty-eight hours of its having been used, anything written with it would fade out of existence, leaving nothing but the blank, unsullied paper where it had been.

"Of course it was a very wicked thing of Andry to do, but he had somehow learnt the contents of the will, and his indignation at the iniquity of its provisions seems to have utterly confused his sense of right and wrong, as, I verily believe, it would have done mine had I been in his place.

"If you ask me what notice I intend taking of the information which has thus strangely come into my keeping, I answer, none at all. And it is a view in which my husband bears me out. I hold myself to be wholly absolved from taking any action whatever in the affair, because my uncle's last wish—nay, his positive command—was that the will in question should be destroyed.

"And thus, after all, his dying wish was carried out, but in a way certainly never contemplated by him."



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